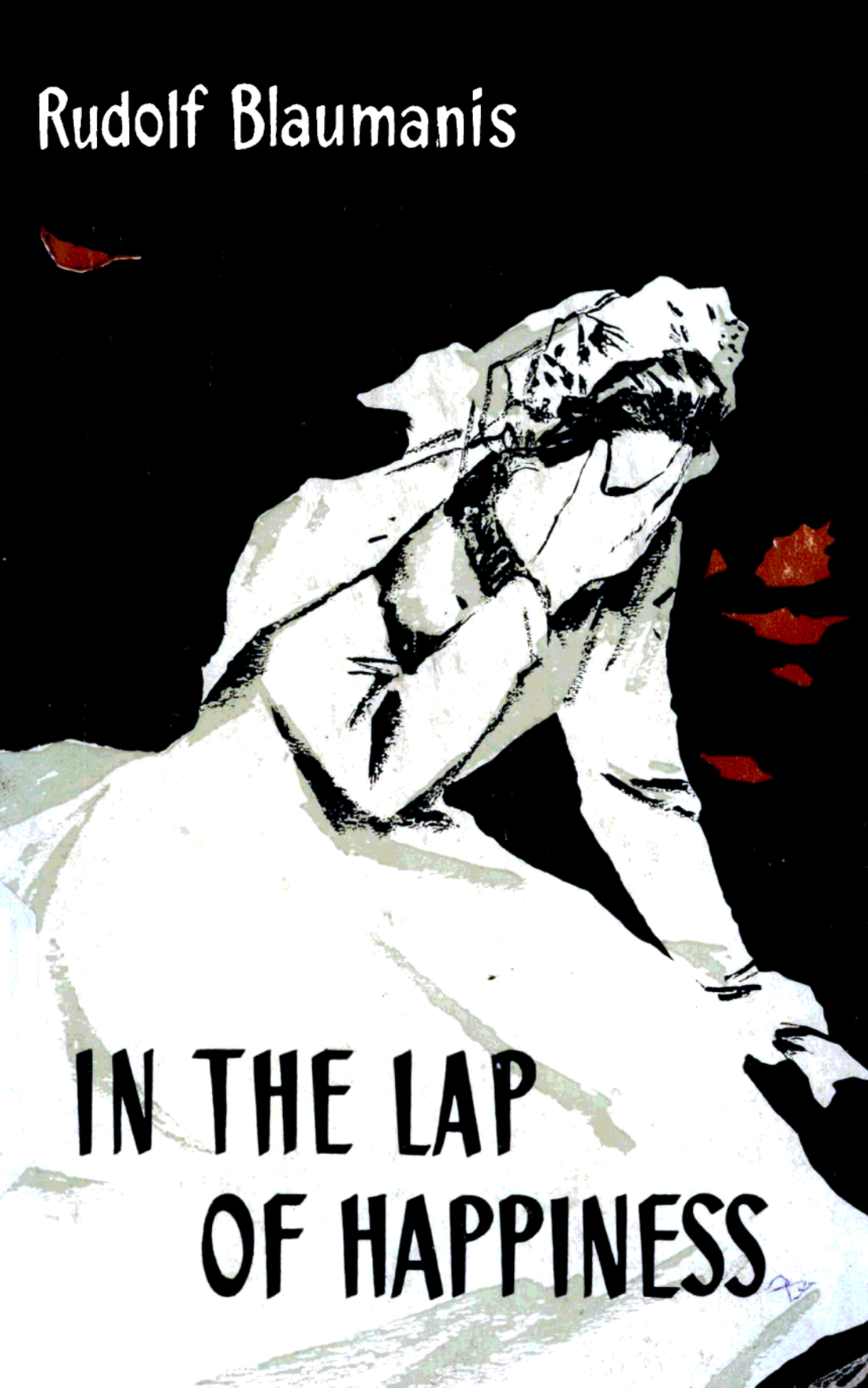
Rudolf Blaumanis



IN THE LAP OF HAPPINESS

"In the Lap of Happiness," a story by the Latvian writer Rudolf Blaumanis (1863–1908), is also the title of the present volume. This somewhat ironical title reflects to some extent the author's own attitude towards life.

People seek happiness and understand it in so many different ways. Blinded by her love for a young and handsome lad, the rich Raudup widow who had sold her youth to an old husband she had never loved, believes that happiness can be bought with wealth. She snatches frantically at this illusion of happiness, to attain which she does not spare her own child.

The daughter of old Koklap ("Story About the Pig That Could Talk") would never have known happiness but for her father's superstition that frustrated his own plans.

Blaumanis' writings reveal the warm touch of an original artist who is moved by kindly feelings for his fellow-men. He plumbs the innermost depths of human psychology, and affirms with a gentle smile that three cannot dance in couples ("Odd Man Out") and that life "in the lap of happiness" is none too sweet.

Rudolf Blaumanis was the son of manor servants on a rural estate. He studied a little at a private school, graduated from the Commercial School in Riga, worked in a business firm's office, and was clerk in a landowner's employ. The future writer closely studied the life of the peasants and manor servants, with whom he quickly formed a close friendship. The only person he could not make friends with was his employer, the master of the estate, who picked quarrels with his "troublesome" clerk and eventually dismissed him.

Blaumanis wrote his first story when he was twenty, and by 1890 he was already author of numerous stories, plays, and articles. He became a regular contributor to a number of Latvian newspapers, and moved over to Riga. After Riga he lived for some years in St. Petersburg. Blaumanis wrote numerous stories, short novels, and plays.

Rudolf Blaumanis

IN THE LAP OF HAPPINESS

Foreign Languages Publishing House
Moscow

РУДОЛЬФ БЛАУМАН

У СЧАСТЬЯ ЗА ПАЗУХОЙ

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Printed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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RAUDUP'S WIDOW

A tolling of church bells—a chanting of funeral hymns in the churchyard—mourners gathered around an open grave—within the grave a magnificent black coffin covered with a beautiful wreath of fresh flowers—and not a single tear.

Who was it taken to his last resting place that day? It was the rich farmer Raudup.

"The days of our years *are* threescore years

and ten; and if by reason of strength *they* be fourscore years, yet *is* their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off and we fly away," the pastor solemnly quoted from the Scriptures, describing the life of the deceased as one of labour and sorrow. He spoke of his long years of illness, and of the humble and truly Christian spirit in which he had borne his cross. Although endowed with worldly wealth, he had kept his heart unspoilt, set on that wealth which neither rust nor moth could destroy, nor thieves steal. Lastly, the pastor mentioned the poor orphaned child and the broken-hearted widow, and ended the funeral service with a prayer to Him who alone could dry the tears of all the bereaved.

And the broken-hearted widow covered her face with a snow-white handkerchief so that no one might see she had no tears to dry, while the poor orphaned child sat on the edge of the grave and stared at the coffin with mingled awe and curiosity, wondering why they should have put his Daddy to sleep so deep in the earth.

The pastor gave the benediction and moved away from the graveside. Four young men with spades took his place. One of them bent over the child and whispered in his ear, "Now, little Matis, throw three handfuls of sand on your father's coffin, and take a last look at Daddy. You won't

see him any more."* The child half-heartedly obeyed and threw little handfuls of sand into the open grave. The young man dug his spade into the ground, took the boy in his arms and carried him away from the crowd, setting him down on a nearby grave. "Sit here, little Matis, while we bury your Dad."

The child, having weak legs, liked to be carried about. "Karlis!" he said, looking up.

"Yes?"

"Stay with me."

"Sit a while by yourself, I haven't any time now. I'll be back soon." But the child would not let him go. Just then the widow came up and said, "Go along, I'll stay with the child." Karlis returned to the grave. The yellow sand fell with hollow thuds upon the coffin. The beautiful wreath was crushed, and presently disappeared from view as the grave filled up. The funeral guests sang a farewell hymn for the dead. Little Matis began to cry. "Where is Karlis?" he demanded. "I want Karlis." His mother tried to soothe him by offering him sweets. "I don't want sweets, go away," the child cried petulantly. "I want Karlis!"

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* According to Latvian superstition the souls of departed parents find no peace unless their children throw sand in their graves.—*Author's note.*

When Karlis returned, Matis grasped his hand and made him sit down beside him. And there they sat together, the three of them, under the moss-grown wooden cross: Raudup's widow, little Matis, and Karlis.

Presently the widow got up and went over to the fresh mound which she covered with wreaths of bilberry leaves entwined with artificial flowers made of dyed shavings. The mourners returned to the carriages that were waiting for them outside the cemetery gates. There they were treated to the traditional brandy and wheaten cakes. They ate and drank, and the widow ate and drank with them, and filled a glass for Karlis who had lifted little Matis into his mother's buggy.

"I want to ride home with you," the child said. "Mother can take your place in Father's cart," meaning the hearse Karlis had driven down to the cemetery. But there was plenty of room for three in the widow's buggy, and so they rode home together. The child fell asleep on the way, and the woman talked incessantly, and was far more lively than befitted a broken-hearted widow. Karlis listened to her in silence, occasionally yawning. It wasn't the first time she was telling him that the late farmer Raudup had been old and poorly, that she had had a hard time nursing him; that she

was now left with a large farm on her hands, which she would find it difficult to run without the help and advice of a man. Neither was it news to him that he had been Raudup's only godson and that the widow was not thirty-five yet. Why listen to it all over again? Only when she mentioned the hundred rubles that farmer Raudup had bequeathed to his godson, saying she was rather short of cash at the moment, but if he wanted it immediately she could find it for him, did Karlis reply:

"Never mind the money just now, you can keep it for me till I need it, and that certainly won't be before St. Martin's day."

The widow nodded and said:

"And don't forget us! Come and see your godfather's son as you used to. Little Matis is so fond of you."

"Yes," Karlis said. "I'll come of a Sunday."

They drove into the Raudup farm. One of the farm-hands attended to the horse, while Karlis helped the widow to alight and carried little Matis indoors. The room was stuffy and smelled of freshly cut fir branches. On the table occupying the whole length of the wall stood two dishes of boiled peas—the traditional symbol of tears at a Latvian funeral. Two servants removed these "tears" and proceeded to lay the table for supper.

The room was soon crowded with funeral guests. Some had brought with them from the cemetery twigs of fir with which they made cuts at the young people amidst general laughter, exclaiming as they did so, "Don't die, don't die, no room for you in the graveyard!" While to the old folk who had stayed at home they chanted, "Time to die, time to die, there's plenty of room in the graveyard!"

Then they all sat down at the table and ate anything. There was a bottle of strong liquor for every four persons and as the wine ran low the talk waxed high and merry, punctuated with bursts of laughter that shook the walls.

Raudup's widow was sitting just opposite Karlis. His face was flushed, what with the heat and the drink, and he looked very handsome indeed. The woman suddenly felt a hot current running through her....

Darkness fell while the guests were still at table. Candles were lighted in the many-forked wooden candlesticks that were wreathed with green twigs. While the older folk remained sitting over their beer and grog and a game of cards, the young ones gathered in the yard, which was now bathed in silvery moonlight. They strolled about, laughing and chattering, and some couples began to dance—without music.

"That's right, that's sensible!" an old man cried, coming out of the room, his voice husky with talk and drink. "Dance, children, dance and be merry! When my time comes, I want you to dance at my funeral too. What's the good of tears? It's all nonsense. When a man's dead, he's dead. Old Raudup was a good sort, aye, that he was. And he would say, 'When I die I want people to be as jolly at my funeral as if it were a wedding party!' "

Some of the young men came up closer and asked whether the deceased had really said so.

"Of course he did! Do you think I would tell a lie about him at his own funeral?"

"Hear that? Now we can really dance! What a pity we have no music. Maybe one of the farm-hands has a fiddle or a concertina?"

It turned out that someone had a concertina, and he fetched it quickly and began to play. More and more couples swung into its rhythm.

Karlis danced too. Leaning on the garden gate, the widow watched his lithe movements that made the girls so willing to rest in his arms. She drew nearer to the dancing couples.

A voice suddenly called for Karlis. Little Matis had woken up and was crying for him. Karlis left his dancing partner and hurried indoors. In the dim light of a tallow candle standing on the

bedroom table he saw two old women asleep in the late farmer's bed, while little Matis was sitting up in his mother's bed crying his eyes out. The loud voices in the adjoining room and the strains of music in the yard had wakened the highly strung child and frightened him. Karlis sat down on the edge of the bed and tried to soothe him, but the child wouldn't go to sleep again. Karlis had to give up dancing and stay with him. Presently the widow entered the room.

"Go to sleep," she said sharply to Matis, but the child took no heed of her, and keeping his large eyes fixed on Karlis, he snuggled up to him still closer.

The widow went over to the cupboard where she kept a bottle of sweet, ruby-coloured Hungarian wine that the doctor had prescribed as a tonic for little Matis. There was a phial there, too, containing a sleeping draught, a few drops of which she used to give to her late husband. She shook the phial, which had just a tiny drop of the medicine left, emptied it into a glass, added some wine, and gave it to the boy.

The child liked the sweet wine and drank it up willingly. In ten minutes he was fast asleep. Karlis gently tucked him in and turned to go, but the widow stopped him.

"Have some of this wine before you go," she said, filling a glass to the brim and handing it to him. "Drink it!"

Karlis needed no second invitation. He drained the glass, saying as he returned it to her, "That's fine!"

"Do you like it? Have another—to steady the other leg!"

He tossed off another glass, thanked her and went out.

The woman helped herself to a glass, too, locked the cupboard and followed Karlis out into the yard where she took up her former position by the garden gate. The music flowed on and on, and couple after couple whirled past her. Some elderly people had joined the throng of dancers, too. But there was none to equal Karlis. He seemed to float through the air, never touching ground.

Suddenly he stopped in front of her.

"Won't you dance?" he said jauntily, his eyes sparkling with the fire of the wine he had just been drinking.

"I will!"

He seemed taken aback, but after a moment's hesitation he took her arm and led her into the middle of the yard.

Raudup's widow danced with Karlis, while the moonbeams weaved their silver shroud over a fresh mound in the churchyard.

The Raudup farm was large indeed, and the widow found it difficult to manage it without the aid of a farmer. When she went out into the fields to supervise the men at work, the maids at home were idle. If she stayed at home to work with the maids, the men lounged about in the fields. And it was not mere laziness she had to contend with! They sowed flax in the barley fields, and barley in the flax fields, and buckwheat in the potato fields, thus messing up her late husband's firmly established system of farming. They harrowed where they should have ploughed, and ploughed where they should have harrowed, and if she ventured a word in protest she would be put off with:

"That's how the master did it," or "That's how he wanted it done."

And so the widow, who had taken no interest in farming when her husband was alive, was easily silenced.

The butter was piling up in the cellar, and had to be taken up to town. The widow knew the way to Riga, for she had been there once with her

husband, but during their absence a stallion had died, and so she didn't like to leave the farm by itself if she could help it. Sometimes she would send a farm-hand to town with the butter, or ask a neighbour to sell it for her, but each time it seemed to her that she got a few rubles less for it than her late husband would have brought home.

At last the poor widow took her troubles to her trustees, but they only laughed at her.

"Take a husband!" one of them said.

"You can't expect to run a large farm like yours without a farmer," the other joined in.

The widow blushed and said, "How can I take another husband before the grass has grown on my first husband's grave!"

The farm was indeed a large one, and the widow found it difficult to manage it single-handed. Her servants grew more rude and cheeky every day, till at last she was compelled to summon her trustees again and ask them for advice.

"I have already told you, take a husband," said the one.

"And I have told you, a farm like yours cannot be run properly without a farmer," added the other.

Again the woman blushed.

"Very well, if you say so . . . I could marry, of course. But who will have an old widow like me?"

The trustees laughed at that. "You old! Why, either of us would marry you right away if he could."

But neither was free to do so. They had come to realize long ago that it was not good for a man to live alone in the world.

However, they had lots of eligible candidates to propose: Marcis Micpapa, Spricis Šlakan, Pieteris Chuchakok, Andž Švaukst, Krustin Kvepin, Brencis Bezben. Between them the trustees named at least a dozen men who would be only too glad to take a hand in running the Raudup farm. But she turned them all down. The first two liked their drop, the other two gambled, and were bad-tempered to boot. Kvepin had lots of money, but little sense, and Bezben was ruled out because little Matis hated him. "What I need is not only a husband for myself, but a father for my child."

"That's true," the trustees agreed. "But where will you find a man to suit both yourself and the child?"

Just then Karlis entered. He called at the farm every other Sunday, but since his godfather's death he had been avoiding the house, and would play with little Matis either in the servants' room or out of doors. This time, however, on hearing voices in the widow's room, he went in. Little Matis

was delighted. He ran up to him, put his arms round his neck, and pressed his face against Karlis' prattling:

"Oh, why didn't you come last Sunday? I was waiting for you all the time! I won't let you go now till the evening!"

Karlis quieted the excited child before greeting the widow and the trustees. Then, sitting down with Matis on his knees, he joined in the general conversation while building card-houses for the boy. At length the trustees got up to look over the Raudup fields. Matis wanted to go too, and asked Karlis to carry him because he could not walk all that way. His mother scolded him for this whim, but Karlis took the boy in his arms and followed the trustees. The fields looked rich and promising, despite the mismanagement during the spring sowing, and so vast were they that even Karlis' strong arms grew tired carrying little Matis about from end to end.

An excellent meal awaited them at the farm when they got back. Little Matis felt drowsy after the meal and was put to bed. Karlis stayed with him until he fell asleep, and then took his leave, while the trustees lingered to have another talk with the widow. They discussed Karlis and could not find enough words in his praise. The widow listened in silence. Finally one of them exclaimed:

"Look here, what about your marrying Karlis? A better husband would be hard to find. What does it matter if he's just an ordinary labourer on the Gailit farm, and younger than you! I wouldn't let that worry me!"

"And he's so good to little Matis, and the child seems to love him too!" the second trustee chimed in. "Honestly, if I were you I wouldn't marry anyone else!"

The widow blushed to the roots of her hair.

"Do you think he will have me?" she said. "Why, a handsome lad like him could pick the prettiest girl. Why should he marry a widow?"

The trustees laughed.

"He may find a prettier wife, but he certainly won't find one as rich as you. Did you hear what he said when we were walking through the fields? He said the Raudup farm was more like an estate. And you doubt whether he'd care to be its owner! Upon my word, he's not such a fool as you think him!"

"All right, I'll think it over."

"Yes, do. That's a clever woman!"

Raudup's widow thought the matter over.

One day she fetched a heap of Sunday clothes

to her room and began to dress up and smarten herself.

"Where are you going?" said little Matis, sitting on the floor by the stove, with his weak legs crossed, sewing a frock for his doll.

But his mother was too absorbed to reply. She was doing her hair in front of the mirror.

"Where are you going, Mummy?" the child repeated, folding his frail white hands in his lap. But she was too busy to answer questions, for she had to decide which of the silk shawls suited her best—the yellow one or the white one? The brown one with the pink flowers or the grey one with the red flowers?

"Mummy, why don't you tell me?" the boy pleaded, and receiving no answer he put down his sewing and tottered across the room towards her.

"Don't get in my way now!" she cried impatiently, as she arranged the grey shawl with the red flowers about her head and shoulders. "I have to pay a visit, and if you're a good boy while I'm away, I shall bring you a present."

"Oh, Mummy, what a lovely sound your shawl makes! It must be so soft! Let me feel it."

"Some other time—when you've washed your hands. Just look at them—goodness knows when you washed them last!" she said and continued to adorn herself. The little boy crouched down

again in his corner by the stove and took up his sewing. Not much of an amusement for a boy, but what else could a poor sickly creature like him do to while away the long hours? A knife would be dangerous, for his weak legs might easily give way and he might fall and cut himself, whereas a needle could not do much harm.

"How lovely you are!" he said after a while, gazing at his mother, who was fully dressed at last.

"Am I?" she said, throwing a last look at herself in the mirror. As she passed him on her way to the door she bent down and gave him a corner of her silken shawl to touch. Little Matis took it in his delicate fingers, turned his great blue eyes upon her, and asked:

"What will you bring me, Mummy?"

"You'll see," she replied.

"Will it be something nice?"

"It will," she said, blushing despite herself, for to her this answer held a special meaning. She quickly went out of the room and stepped into the waiting buggy.

Her road led to the Gailit farm, and as she drew near it she found chimney-sweeping in progress there. A tall man, covered with soot, stood swaying dangerously on the ridge of the farmhouse roof, shouting orders down the chimney. She recognized the chimney-sweep's voice at once, and

as she alighted from her buggy and tethered the horse, an odd feeling of anxiety seized her.

She went into the farmer's house. Half an hour later, Mother Gailit came into the servants' quarters where she found Karlis about to take out the soot. She told him to drop what he was doing and quickly wash his face, for Raudup's widow wanted to talk to him.

The soot hadn't got in his ears, he replied jokingly, and he could listen just as well to the widow unwashed.

"Man alive!" she exclaimed, giving him a light slap on the shoulder. "Go and do as you're told, and be quick about it! Can't you guess what has brought her here? She wants to marry you!"

"Good gracious!" Karlis exclaimed, his eyes widening. "Marry me! If that's what she wants, tell her I'm out. I don't want to see her!"

Mother Gailit shook her head. "How can I tell her that if she saw you standing on the roof just now, and recognized you. Go inside and don't be shy, I'll leave you two alone!"

"I don't want to meet her," Karlis persisted.

"Oh, but why not, Karlis? Listen, you're not going to be fool enough to—"

"I will not marry her," Karlis broke in. "I just won't, and that's flat. Do me a favour, tell her I was here when she came but I've gone away since."

"Nonsense! You'll have to see her all the same. If she doesn't see you today, she'll call again and again till she does. What are you afraid of, anyway? She can't carry you off by force!"

"All right, I'll go," Karlis said. "But I'll go just as I am, unwashed. Maybe that'll frighten her away!"

However, the emotion reflected on the widow's face when Karlis entered the room was anything but fright. A thrill ran through her body as her eyes embraced the comely lad. Black as he was, he seemed to her as beautiful as an angel.

Karlis smiled with a mingled sense of embarrassment and amusement, then cleared his throat and said, "Good day!"

"Good day," she replied, chokingly. Karlis sat down on the ledge of the stove, and to break the awkward silence he said at length:

"Well, who's going to talk first? I suppose I ought to ask Mother Raudup what has brought her here?"

Mother Raudup! The blood rushed to her face. Never before had Karlis called her that. What made him do it now? She controlled herself, however—the less said the better—and replied:

"Well, you might have guessed yourself what has brought me here. I want to make a farmer of you. It's better than sweeping chimneys."

"Mother Raudup means well, I see," Karlis replied, keeping his eyes on his sooty hands. "But I'm afraid being a farmer will be harder for me than chimney-sweeping. This is a job I know, but I've never tried to run a farm before."

"I'll see to it that you make a proper farmer," she replied. "I don't think you'll object to having me for a teacher, will you?"

Although Karlis had known from the start that their conversation would take the turn it did, he felt awkward and tongue-tied now that he was pressed to give a straightforward reply. Seeing him hesitate, the enamoured lady urged him with a sweet smile, "Well, what do you say?"

Very well, if she insists on an answer she'll get it, he thought, and aloud he said, "I understand Mother Raudup wants to marry me. But I'm afraid it's impossible."

The answer took her by surprise and her voice shook slightly as she repeated, "Impossible? But why, Karlis?"

"We're no match. You're a rich farmer's widow, and I am just a poor farm-labourer. What would people say!"

The widow burst out laughing. "People? What do I care! Let them say what they like, we are still free to please ourselves, aren't we? Worrying about gossip will never get you anywhere."

"Maybe.... But I can't marry you all the same, Mother Raudup," Karlis replied.

The widow sprang to her feet. He must be joking, he cannot mean it! She recalled her trustees' words: "He's not such a fool as you think him...." She drew closer to him and said:

"Come, Karlis, be reasonable. You're just being difficult!"

"I'm not!" Karlis retorted, backing away from her. "Don't come too near, you'll soil your clothes."

But she took no notice of his words, and sat down beside him on the ledge of the stove.

"Why not simply say you agree to go with me?"

"Because I don't! I've told you already, I can't!"

"You really mean it?"

"I do, Mother Raudup, in all earnest!"

She went first crimson, then deathly pale, and her eyes were glued on the face of the handsome lad in front of her who would not return her look. So he did not want her. This farm-labourer was rejecting the hand of the rich owner of the Raudup farm. Shame and grief overwhelmed her so that she could hardly keep her voice level as she said, "I suppose you think I'm too old for you?"

"Oh, not at all! I'll be old myself one day."

"Then—I'm not beautiful enough, is that it?"

"No, it's not that either. You're not bad-looking."

"Then why don't you want me, Karlis? There must be some reason."

Karlis suddenly grinned and said, "To be frank, there *is* a reason. If it were not for that—"

"Tell me!" she urged. "Is it another woman?"

The question made him blush, and he was glad of the soot that concealed it. He replied with a gesture of annoyance:

"Another woman, indeed!"

"Why can't you tell me what it is, Karlis? What's the obstacle?"

Karlis rose to his feet. What answer could he give this importunate woman without hurting her too much? In his embarrassment, he thrust his hand in his pocket and found there a pebble that Matis had slipped into it the previous Sunday. It gave him an idea.

"Very well, I'll tell you my reason: I don't want to be a stepfather," he said, and turned to go. But the widow seized his sooty hand.

"Do you mean to say that you refuse me because of Matis?" she cried. "Oh, but how can you? You are so fond of each other, why shouldn't you be a father to him? No, no, you're not telling me the truth, you're keeping something back! I won't let you go unless you tell me the truth!"

Karlis felt his anger rising. "This is the limit!" he thought. "She wants to worm my secret out of

me, but she won't. I'll tell her something that'll put a stop to all this."

And he said hotly, "Well, if you want to know the truth, my reason is that the farm you promise me belongs by rights to Matis and not to you." She let go his hand, and he strode out of the room with a stubborn, determined air.

The widow returned home. Without uttering a word she passed the reins to a farm-hand, hurried to her room and sank into a chair. What a disgrace! She, the wealthy owner of a farm, had been spurned by a common lad who had nothing to his credit but good looks. She was indeed wealthy, for although the farm would eventually belong to her son, her own share of the property was worth more than two average-sized farms taken together. That was common knowledge, and Karlis must have known it too. Yet he had refused her hand! He coveted even greater wealth, the fool! Vain hopes. You may be handsome, my lad, but no daughter of a rich landowner would marry you for all that!

She looked round the room. Where was the child? His doll lay on the floor, but the boy was nowhere to be seen. Strange thoughts leapt to her

mind: what if something had befallen him in her absence?

She went into the next room. There he was, asleep in his bed, wrapped in a shawl. His small face was turned towards the light, and she could plainly see how thin and pale it was. But instead of stirring pity, as it usually did, the child's pathetic appearance only deepened the bitterness of her heart. She turned away, slipped off her shawl and put it into the wardrobe. The door of the wardrobe creaked, wakening the child, and he sat up in bed, rubbing his eyes with his thin hands.

"Home already, Mummy? I've been a very good boy, see, I went to bed," he said.

"Yes, you've been good," she said harshly.

"Have you brought me a present?"

She pulled out a drawer, took out a lump of sugar and threw it across the room to him. "Here's your present!" And she quickly locked the wardrobe and went out of the room.

That night she was haunted by nightmare visions. She dreamt that she was standing in her room, which was strewn with twigs of freshly cut fir and adorned with branches of fir-tree. In the middle of the room stood a little coffin, and in it lay her child, his face pale and thin. By the window sat Karlis—exactly where he had sat on

the day her trustees had come to see her—smiling and beckoning to her. With a cry of joy she flew into his arms and embraced his beautiful body, while he kissed her ardently on the lips. Suddenly little Matis began to whimper in his coffin. Karlis gave a start and pushed her from him. She fell, and in falling, knocked against the coffin and—woke up.

Matis was crying and calling her.

"What's the matter?" she said crossly. Was that child going to separate her from Karlis even in her dreams? "What do you want?"

"I'm thirsty," the boy whispered, dry-mouthed.

"You'll drink in the morning," she snapped. "Now go to sleep and stop snivelling."

The child fell silent. Now and then he moaned in his sleep, but his mother heard nothing. She was dreaming again.

Four weeks passed. Nothing noteworthy occurred on the farm, except perhaps that the widow's attitude towards little Matis had visibly changed.

The mother treated her child more kindly. Formerly she had been prone to scold and chide him, or speak harshly to him. Now, he never heard an angry word from her. She had formerly put a

restraint on his every movement, but now she let him do as he pleased. He could play with fire as if it were no more dangerous than a flower. He could spend hours by the well if he wished, throwing chips into the water or otherwise amusing himself; he could climb all the stairs and ladders in the house although his legs were no stronger than before, and he was even allowed to play in the sand-pit at the back of the house, although it was far from safe and had already caved in once. His mother did not seem to notice his movements.

"I can't be so strict with him all the time, poor thing," she said, when the farm people reproached her for letting him go unchecked. "I haven't the heart to stop him doing what he wants. I've always been strict with him, let him have some fun now. God will guard him. He watches over the weak."

Indeed, God seemed to be taking special care of little Matis. The child did just as he liked, and never came to harm. On the contrary, the greater freedom he was now enjoying seemed to do him good. The sickly pallor of his cheeks gave way to a faint touch of pink. On seeing him gaining strength, his mother one day bought him a penknife from a pedlar.

"A boy must learn to handle a knife," she said. "He's big enough. I don't want him to become a tailor."

And when the child wanted it sharpened she indulged him in this, too, and had its blade made as keen as a razor's. So Matis had a new toy to play with. She was as kind as a mother could be. And nevertheless the boy grew more estranged from her every day. He was afraid of her. Perhaps he had caught one of those stealthy resentful glances which she sometimes cast at him, or perhaps he instinctively felt the evil, unnatural thoughts that gnawed at her heart.

"Shall I give up my happiness for the sake of this cripple?" she would say to herself. "Have I not suffered enough, nursing an old invalid husband? Am I to waste all my life nursing the sick? I will not have it! Why should I? Why? Am I not as good as other women who are happy all their lives? Can't I have some share of this world's happiness in the autumn of my life? I could never love my first husband. But I can love Karlis. Ah, how I love him! How handsome he is, how big, and strong, and healthy. His lips are so red, and I could be kissing them now if not for that child. O merciful heaven! Why does he not die? He is nothing but a burden both to himself and to me! He's my cross, but I'll get rid of it! I cannot live

without Karlis. If that child does not die soon, something dreadful will happen. Surely that cannot be a sin? Cripples ought not to be allowed to live in this world. What good are they to themselves or to others? Of what use is Matis' life? None, none whatever. . . ."

Such were the thoughts that had taken root in her mind, and were growing and growing beyond her control. In the daytime she could think of no one but Karlis, and at night he would visit her in her dreams. She gazed at him in church, oblivious of all the world, and neither listened to the sermon nor uttered a word of prayer. She quivered with jealousy when she saw him talking kindly to some young girl, and was beside herself with joy when he spoke to her.

"You are on the brink of a precipice, bethink yourself before it is too late. Banish your wicked thoughts!" her conscience warned her. "Pull yourself together and do your duty by your child. You must love him the more for being a cripple, and with your love lighten the burden of his sufferings. And are you so very sure that Karlis will make you happy? Can you be happy with such a horrible crime, should it happen, weighing on your conscience? Banish these thoughts, woman, banish them lest you commit an irreparable sin."

But she dismissed the voice of her better self. One single thought went round and round in her brain—how to get rid of her hated child. Disaster was inexorably drawing in upon her.

It was a hot day in August. On the Raudup farm all the hands were out reaping the barley in a distant field, and the mistress of the farm was at home by herself. She had been pressing curds and was now standing outside the kitchen door washing the dishes. Her face was burning hot, and she stopped now and then to wipe the sweat from her brow and gaze vacantly into space. How quiet it was! Even the swallows seemed to have gone out to the fields with the workmen. Only now and then a stray bird flew past her, so close that it almost touched her face. Little Matis was nowhere to be heard or seen. But that did not worry her, and she calmly went on with her work. Either the reapers had taken the child with them into the fields, or he was pottering about somewhere.

Needing some more water to rinse her dishes, she balanced the yoke with the pails on her shoulders and directed her steps to the well, which was just beyond the cattle shed not far from the house. When she reached the shed she saw little Matis crouching on a plank thrown across the rim

of the well, trying to fish something out of the water with a long-handled rake. Judging by the child's strained attitude the object was a heavy one. At last he succeeded. She could see him hauling up a smooth round stone, like a ball, one of his favourite toys. He grasped it and was about to set it down on the plank in front of him, when the wet stone slipped out of his hands. He made a snatch at it—the woman heard a splash, a strangled cry of terror that died at once.

For a moment she stood aghast. The empty plank was floating on the surface of the water. The child had fallen into the well.

"Quick, quick, save your child!" her better self urged, and she ran, ran so fast that she lost the pails, and reached the well just in time to see the boy's head appear once more above the surface while his little hands clutched at the plank in mortal terror.

"Mummy!" he gasped, and the water filled his mouth again, dragging him down to the bottom. His frail fingers clung to the plank, and his feeble legs frantically threshed the water in an attempt to steer himself to the edge of the well. One last gurgle—and he was gone.

The woman threw a furtive glance around, first at the hillside, then at the wood. There was not a soul in sight.

An evil gleam came into her eyes. She removed the yoke from her shoulders and raised it, then lowered it again, murmuring, "Thy will be done, O Lord!" Just as the thought of God flashed through her mind, Matis sank to the bottom of the well.

A swallow darted down out of the blue, so close to her that it almost touched her face, and vanished with a shrill cry.

The widow's room was strewn with twigs of freshly cut fir and adorned with fir branches. In the middle of the room stood a small coffin, and in it lay her child, his face pale and thin. So far her dream had come true. But Karlis was not sitting by the window, beckoning to her—Karlis was in town, buying a wooden horse for his little friend, unaware of the coffin and the chanting of funeral hymns. He did not learn about the accident until he got back. Hardly able to believe it, he hastened to the Raudup farm to hear it confirmed by the mother herself. Although far from sentimental by nature, he could not restrain his tears. The widow wept, too, and looked so woebegone that Karlis sat down beside her, took her hand in his and tried to comfort her.

In the two months that followed the widow scarcely saw anything of Karlis. Those two months of mourning were her last sacrifice for her child. During that time, however, the bereaved mother underwent a gradual change. She turned into a rather merry widow whose face entirely belied the heavy loss she had so recently suffered. Only when she stood in front of her mirror again one day, adjusting her grey silk shawl with the red flowers, did she discover two new lines on her forehead. She pulled the shawl down lower and drove to the Gailit farm.

This time Karlis was not on the ridge of the roof, and an old woman, bent with age, came out of the farmhouse just as she was approaching. "Couldn't you wait with your coming out!" the widow said to herself, mindful of the superstition that it was a bad omen if the first person one met on one's way was a woman.

Indeed, her errand proved fruitless. Karlis was out. Mother Gailit told her that he had been sent for to clean out a well at the pagast court.

To clean out a well! . . . She clenched her teeth, mentioning Karlis no more, and soon took her leave.

Several days later the annual autumn fair of the pagast was opened. The widow hoped to meet Karlis there and have a heart-to-heart talk with him.

The fair swarmed with people, and it took her

some time to find Karlis. At last she saw him on the fringe of the pine-wood on the other side of the highroad, talking to another lad. The latter went away when he saw her coming up, and she had Karlis to herself, which was just what she wanted.

"I've been looking for you all over the place," she said, shaking his hand. "I suppose you've just come."

"Not at all," Karlis replied. "Can't you see how drunk I am!" He broke into hilarious laughter that really sounded tipsy. His cheeks were redder than usual, his eyes were glittering, and his every movement was so lithe and self-assured that she gazed at him utterly fascinated. It seemed to her that she had never yet seen him so handsome.

"Drunk indeed!" She gave him a playful slap on the shoulder. "Trying to pull my leg!"

"Of course I'm drunk! I've been here since early this morning. I took a cow up to the fair and sold it, and we wetted the bargain. I've seen you at least a dozen times already!"

"And you didn't come up?"

"I didn't know you wanted me to!"

"You didn't know? Didn't Mother Gailit tell you I called at the farm?"

"Well, yes, she did. But I thought—"

Karlis left his sentence unfinished and paused

to brush a straw from his sleeve with an air of studied unconcern.

"What did you think?"

"Well, I thought that matter was over and done with!"

"Over and done with? Oh, don't say that, Karlis!" she cried, unable to control her passion any longer. "If you knew how dearly I love you! Dear, dear Karlis, come to the Raudup farm and be its owner. You'll be rich, you'll live like a real gentleman. I'll wait on you hand and foot, as if you were my lord and master and not my husband, I'll—"

She stopped, overwhelmed with emotion, her bosom heaving. She would have gladly died for Karlis at that moment.

After a while she resumed in a wheedling tone: "You can't refuse me now, you have no reason. Nothing stands in the way of our marriage. You'll have to come to my farm now, you'll really have to!"

"Will I?" Karlis said facetiously, while his eyes wandered up and down the road, as if he were afraid somebody might approach and overhear their conversation. "What makes you think there is nothing that stands in the way of our marriage?"

"But there isn't. There can't be now.... There was only one obstacle you spoke about last time —and that's gone now!"

"Gone? What are you talking about?"

"I mean the reason why you refused me.... Little Matis...."

"Matis? Oh, Mother Raudup, do you really believe I refused to marry you because of that poor child?"

She suddenly went very pale.

"But you said so!" she cried.

"So I did, I remember now. But I only said it because you kept at me, wanting to know the reason why I couldn't accept your proposal. At that time I couldn't and wouldn't tell you, but it certainly wasn't Matis. Why, I loved the child as if he were my own little brother."

Karlis' voice shook slightly, and he broke off.

"So it was not Matis," the widow repeated in a toneless whisper. "It was not Matis. And what was ... what is the real reason?"

"Well, I can tell you the truth now," Karlis said. "I can't marry you for the simple reason that I am going to marry Maria Karklen. We've been engaged since last summer, but we had to keep it a secret because her father wouldn't have me. But since I inherited the hundred rubles from my godfather he changed his mind, and so now I can talk openly about my happiness. We've fixed the wedding for St. Martin's day!"

He started to go, but she clung to his arm. "Wait, don't go!" she cried in a strangled voice. "Karlis, do you really mean it! You won't marry me, you'll marry another woman? You will marry Maria. Karlis, I can't bear it. I'll die."

"Don't talk nonsense, Mother Raudup! Let me go!" Karlis said angrily, trying to shake her off. "People are looking at us!"

"Let them look, what do I care!" she gasped, losing all self-control. "Let them look. I won't let you go until you promise—"

"You crazy woman!" Karlis shouted, wrenching himself free. "What do you want? Leave me alone, you witch, I'm not going to sell myself to you! If you like, though, come along, and I'll buy you half a dozen other husbands in my stead!"

She stared at him open-mouthed as if stunned by a terrible blow. Then slowly sanity returned to her. She seized his hand in a vice-like grip and dragged him back into the pine-wood with irresistible strength.

"What was that you said?" she hissed, her eyes blazing. "What were you going to buy me? How dare you speak to me like that? I could strangle you like the cur you are! Why did you lie to me? Why did you not tell me frankly you were engaged? Why did you speak of Matis when you should have spoken of your Maria? Maria! So

she is going to be the lucky one—that beggar of a woman. Why, she hasn't got a tenth of what I have! And yet you want her, yet she's dearer to you than I am! Or has she bewitched you? What has she ever done for you? She hasn't so much as lifted a straw from your path, and yet you love her and not me, me who.... Do you know what I've done for you? You think Matis died because God meant him to die? Nothing of the kind. Ah, you've grown pale! You are right, it was not the Lord's will. I could have saved him, but you were dearer to me than my child, and I let him drown. And now you take another woman! Go on, marry your Maria! My curse upon you! May your tongue shrivel in your mouth for your lies, may the poor child's ghost haunt you day and night as long as you live!"

Releasing his hand, she gave him such a violent push in the chest that he nearly fell, then she disappeared among the pines, leaving Karlis frozen to the spot, dumbfounded. It was quite a time before he recovered sufficiently to tear himself away and walk back to the highroad.

The road was thronged with people moving up and down. Horse dealers were putting horses through their paces, farmers were driving their

branded cattle for sale, merry youths and girls were strolling about, laughing and joking. In the market-place itself young and old crowded round the stalls, money jingled as it changed hands amid the laughter of vendors and buyers, children blew brightly-coloured clay whistles made in the shape of ducks, and here and there the general gaiety was disturbed by a quarrel. From the refreshment stalls, where old and young were wetting their dry throats with beer, came the clatter of glasses and bottles. Young girls were sitting on the carts nibbling gingerbread and cakes, and gossiping, while their mothers and grandmothers were wagging their tongues just as nimbly.

All of a sudden the old women fell silent and pricked up their ears. What was that noise? The young girls quickly thrust the remains of their gingerbread into their pockets and jumped up, craning their necks to see what was going on. The men left their drinks and hurried towards the road, and presently half the market crowd was gathered on the highroad in anxious curiosity.

"What's up?" people shouted, and rising above the hubbub came the answer:

"An accident!"

"What is it?"

"A woman. Run over by a cart."

"Who?"

A long moment elapsed before the answer came.

"Raudup's widow."

Her body lay prostrate, surrounded by a crowd of onlookers. Her smashed head rested in the lap of the market watchman, who was washing the blood off it. Who could tell how it had happened? Some said it had been her own fault, others said the driver was to blame. The man had been driving a heavy cart drawn by two horses at great speed, raising a cloud of dust—and when the dust had settled, there she was, lying in the road with a smashed skull.

A tolling of church bells—a chanting of funeral hymns in the churchyard—an open grave—within the grave a magnificent black coffin covered with a beautiful wreath of flowers—around it a crowd of smiling heirs. Who was it taken to his last resting place that day?

It was Raudup's widow.

1889

STORY ABOUT THE PIG THAT COULD TALK

During the great war of 1870 ancient superstitions and belief in witchcraft and sorcery still flourished, to the detriment of Christianity, in many remote parts of our country where education had not penetrated to enlighten the minds of the peasants.

Rich farmer Koklap was no exception among the peasants, and he knew as little about German

glory as he did about the French disasters. So while Prince Friedrich-Karl, and Basin, and thousands of others were thinking about war, and human blood was flowing freely before the walls of Metz, all farmer Koklap was thinking about was how to kill his pig, order caps for the bride, and rinse and fill his beer-barrels; and all he did was potter around in his pigsty. Now, the time of year in which the battle of Metz was fought was a very unfavourable time for slaughtering, for it was the season of greatest heat, when pigs are lean, and farmers have plenty of work on their hands. Therefore, no farmer worthy of the name ever slaughters his pigs at such a season, and neither would Koklap have done so had he not had his hand forced by the sudden emergency of having to wed his daughter Eda to his neighbour's son Spricis Vimba, an emergency in which no sorcery or incantations could help. Although the parents on both sides had long since agreed on the expedience of such a marriage as a means of uniting their adjoining farmlands, yet they had not reckoned on having to hurry the event. In the confusion that naturally arose it did not occur to Koklap until four days before the appointed day that he ought to kill his best pig for the feast, which gave him very little time to fatten it up.

Now he was standing by the grindstone which

a little boy was turning for him as fast as he could, sharpening the knife he had selected to do the killing with.

"Faster!" Koklap yelled, for he was very angry. His farm-hands were sowing the rye, and retting the flax, and reaping the wheat all on their own. A fat lot he'd be making that year! Neighbour Bamban was sure to bewitch his rye fields with his evil eye and spoil the crop, and the rats would devour the wheat, and the flax would be left to soak until it was red. Heaven knows, you couldn't expect those fellows to work properly! What did they care if all the yield went to the dogs—it wasn't theirs!

"Faster!" he bellowed, crimson with rage, and flourished his knife as if he were going to stab the boy.

"Yessir!" the boy cried. He would gladly have run away had not the farmer promised his mother a quarter of the pig's guts, and the lungs and liver to boot, if he helped in the killing. So he swallowed his fear and turned the wheel so vigorously that the water under it spurted into the air. Both he and his master were so intent on their work that neither of them noticed the stranger who had entered the yard from the road. Not until he had come up quite close and greeted them did Koklap raise his eyes to see a man

dressed in city style with a leather travelling bag in his hand and a large folded shawl across his shoulder.

Instead of returning the stranger's greetings, Koklap merely said, "Well?" and tried the keen edge of the knife with the thumb of his left hand. "Come to buy cattle?"

"No."

"So much the better, for I haven't any to sell. You can go straight on. Or is there anything else you want, sir?"

"Well, yes . . . as a matter of fact I . . . er . . . I wanted to ask you to put me up for the night. I was foolish enough to turn off the highroad, and I've lost my way. Looks like rain, too," the stranger said, put out by the farmer's surly manner.

Koklap eyed him from top to toe, still drawing his thumb up and down the blade. Then he pointed his deadly weapon to the front door of his house. The stranger's eyes followed the direction.

"Do you see anything there?" the farmer said. "Over my door, I mean."

"No, I don't."

"Nor do I. My house isn't an inn. I don't put up tramps."

"But, my dear sir, I beg you! It's late—and it's going to rain—I'm a perfect stranger in these

parts. I'm not asking you to do it for nothing," he stammered.

"Oh, you don't want it for nothing, do you? Can you stick a pig?"

"No."

"Ret flax?"

"What's that?"

"Sow rye?"

"No."

"Reap barley?"

"No, but I can—"

"... steal anything that lies about!" Koklap roared, his face turning the colour of a ripe plum. "Yes, that you can, I'm sure! I know how that brass mug of mine disappeared last year! A fellow came along, just like you, and pinched it. And now you come and think you've hit your luck with me! Just look at him! And how on earth did you nose out that I was preparing for my daughter's wedding?"

"But, my dear sir, I never knew—"

"No, you didn't, you just came to pry around and see where I was going to smoke my meat, and where my guests would tether their horses. You fellows have a nose for finding out these things. But let me tell you, I wasn't born yesterday. I know your sort. Clear out, clear out before it gets dark!"

The blood rushed to the stranger's face, but a glance at the rapidly gathering clouds made him control his anger.

"You are mistaken, sir, if you take me for a thief or a tramp," he said. "I don't need to steal. Look!" And he went up to the boy, touched his nose with his finger, and out fell a silver ruble. He touched the boy's nose again and again, and each time a silver coin dropped to the ground. The stranger gathered up the money and jingled it in his hand, looking at Koklap with a smile.

For a moment Koklap was dumbfounded. Then slowly he regained his senses, and backed away, making the sign of the cross.

"Ah, so that's what you are!" he thundered. "That's the sort you are! Well, I'm not afraid of you! I wasn't born yesterday! You can't harm me as long as I've nothing to do with you, I know that! Get out, quick! Get out, I tell you!"

The stranger, who had evidently expected his conjuring trick to have the opposite effect, stood hesitating for a while, but seeing the infuriated farmer making ready for a bodily assault he slowly turned on his heel.

"At least you might show me the way to the nearest farm," he said.

But even that paltry service was denied him, so he set out at random, choosing a different road

from the one by which he had come. It took him downhill to a meadow in which stood a hay shed the door of which had been taken off its hinges. He saw that very little hay had been gathered in, and the stacks stood almost untouched in the meadow, no doubt because all the farm-hands had been sent to help with the sudden wedding preparations. He cast an anxious glance at the sky, which was rapidly growing darker and more menacing, and resolutely made for the shed. Even if the farmer had let him stay, he could not have expected anything better than a loft with a little hay or straw to sleep on. So he pushed the displaced doorstep back into place, sat down on it, produced an egg from his travelling bag, pricked it at both ends, held the egg to his nose to smell whether it was fresh, sucked it out and dropped the empty shell on the ground. Then he ate a slice of bread which he had found in his coat pocket, took a long sip of vodka from a flask, then smoked two cigarettes. When he had finished smoking he retired into the far corner of the shed, wrapped himself up in his shawl and fell asleep.

But Koklap did not go to rest that night until he had drawn crosses in charcoal over the cattle-shed and on his stable door, and taken other well-known precautions to safeguard his house and home against evil spirits.

The farmer was up betimes the next morning, and accompanied by the boy and another farm-hand, he hastened to the sty, where the pig, left to starve the previous night, was making a dreadful noise.

Exasperated by a bad night in which the thunderstorm and visions of huge noses with silver rubles dripping from them had combined to give him no sleep, and enraged by the piercing squeals of the pig, he flung the door open and raised his axe with the intention of bringing it down on the animal with a stunning blow. But the door struck the wall and swung back with such force that it knocked him aside and he missed the pig, which darted past him unharmed.

The boys threw themselves upon the animal, one grabbing it by the ear, the other by a less dignified part of its anatomy, but it tore itself away with a furious grunt and was off.

A wild chase began. The terrified creature, goaded by a night's starvation following so suddenly on four days of abundance, tore through the farm-yard at lightning speed, then crashed through the gate into Koklap's beautiful hemp field, trampling it down good and proper, thence made for the cabbage garden, from there into a half-reaped wheat field, and finally sped downhill into the meadow.

His face black with fury, and pouring with sweat, the farmer ran after it, yelling horrible oaths, and flourishing his knife, which he had—he knew not when—exchanged for the axe. The whole household were at his heels, roused to his aid by the infernal noise, and were now helping him in a most thoroughgoing fashion to turn the wheat field into a threshing-floor.

The pig made a frantic zigzag across the meadow first from right to left, then from left to right, till at last, utterly exhausted, it made a dash for the shed. But no sooner were its forelegs over the threshold than Koklap, who had been lying in ambush behind a haystack, flung himself on his prey in a blind fury and plunged the knife into its body several times right up to the handle.

The pig was dead in a matter of seconds, sprawling across the threshold in the very position in which Koklap had caught it—its forelegs inside and its hind-legs outside the shed.

"A hot chase that!" cried one out of the crowd of pursuers who had gathered round the doorway. "The craziest thing I've ever seen!"

"Yes," another one joined in, mopping his wet face. "I never thought a pig could be so quick on its feet. Thank goodness it's dead."

"Tut, tut, all that blood wasted!" a thrifty old

woman mumbled. "Now there won't be any blood-pudding for the wedding."

"Never mind about the blood-pudding," another woman said. "Things work out for the best. I shouldn't be surprised if some envious person bewitched that pig to make it go wild like that. You never can tell. Now all the evil has come out with the blood."

"That's the truth!" the farmer roared, once more plunging his knife into the pig's back. "Of course it was bewitched. I never thought of it last night. It was that stranger's doing!"

"Somebody's been here," a boy said suddenly. "There's an egg shell here."

"Ah!" the farmer cried, looking at the shell. "That's either Bamban, the scoundrel, or last night's sorcerer again. He wanted to bewitch my hay. Worse for you, my friend. I'll stick that shell into a hub." For, as we know, if this kind of egg shell is pushed into the hub of an old wheel, and the hole plugged up with a piece of ash-wood, and the wheel then thrown into a swamp, the spell loses its power, and the person who has cast it must die—unless Koklap gives him a drink of water.

"And now we'll go home and fetch a cart!" he said, and they all turned to go when suddenly an unbelievable thing happened, so utterly unbeliev-

able that it froze the blood in their veins and riveted them to the spot.

The pig began to speak.

A hollow voice coming from its bleeding head said:

"Alas, farmer, alas! Your daughter shall not marry . . . not unless one man eats all my meat . . . one man alone. . . . Alas, farmer, alas! . . . Heed this warning, otherwise misfortune will befall you as swiftly as my feet had carried me."

Koklap went as white as a sheet. "Did you hear it?" he wanted to ask, but his voice failed him, and he could not utter a sound. And the pig spoke again, repeating the same words, only this time they seemed to come from its belly.

Koklap stood aghast, and none of the others could stir a limb. And again the pig raised its voice, now from the part of its body which lay outside the shed, uttering the same sentences word for word. Then silence fell which nobody dared to break.

All of a sudden a host of devils seemed to have been turned loose in the shed. From one corner came the call of a cuckoo, from another the trill of a nightingale, from the third the barking and whining of a dog, then a sound as of someone sawing wood, and other queer noises that sounded

as if the shed were haunted by a legion of lost souls.

Hearing this, everyone's hair stood on end. At last the more timorous hastily made the sign of the cross and took to their heels. This galvanized the others into action, and they followed suit. Up the hill they fled, Koklap with them, blue in the face, and reached the farm gasping for breath like fish out of water.

When the excitement had somewhat died down, and all, peasantwise, had told one another over and over again what they had just gone through—adding to the story their own personal feelings and experiences—the question arose what to do next? One thing was certain—unless they did what the pig had told them, it would fare ill with Koklap, and his home would go to rack and ruin. The egg shell should be buried with all honours, for on no account could it now be stuck away in a hub, lest the all-powerful sorcerer be angered still more. Clearly nothing they could do would frustrate him.

But who was to eat all that pork? The mere thought of it sent cold shivers down their spines. Or was Eda to remain unmarried? No, they could not allow that to happen either.

Presently the farmer's wife spoke up saying she knew a way out, but it could only work if the

miracle they had just witnessed was kept in strict secrecy. Would everyone present swear to it?

He'd like to see anyone refuse, Koklap declared, glaring round with such a look that everyone hastily promised to keep it a dead secret. Then his wife spoke again.

Everyone knew Adam Roga, she said, the fellow who dug ditches in the swamp belonging to the estate, and all knew what a husky fellow he was. He had had a special spade made for himself the size of half a *purvieta** and he ate up a whole loaf of bread a day and said it wasn't enough. Now that was the very man who could gobble up the pig in the shortest possible time, so long as he didn't know what he was doing it for. They must get hold of him at once.

"Yes, but what shall we tell him?" someone ventured to ask.

"We'll tell him it's a bet," the farmer said. "People call me cussed. Well, I'll say I made a bet that Roga would eat up the pig in three weeks."

Spricis was duly notified that the wedding was to be postponed, and the men, shaking in their shoes, carried the pig's carcass home, cut it up and cured it. Koklap then brought Roga home from

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* A *purvieta* is about $^2/_3$ of an acre.—*Tr.*

the swamp and sat him down at the table which was loaded with platters of pork.

Roga was indeed a giant of a man with a handsome, good-natured, childlike face. His hair was soft and as fair as flax, and a fluffy down of the same hue showed on his upper lip. He took the story of the bet in good faith and cheerfully proceeded to do his part in it.

It soon became clear that the farmer's wife had not exaggerated his capacity to eat. Indeed, had Adam come to Koklap's house under other circumstances, the farmer would most certainly have checked him in the strongest language. As it was, he now rejoiced to see that accursed pork going, and took care that it was set before Adam at least three times a day, boiled, roasted, hot and cold.

This went on for about a week until at last the giant seemed to have had enough of the monotonous fare, and the bowls of meat became slower in emptying themselves of their contents. However, Koklap, as we know, was not born yesterday, and he soon found a way out. He opened a barrel of the good wedding ale, and produced a bottle of strong spiced liquor to wash down the meat. The remedy worked, and Adam regained his former appetite. The poor lad truly believed he was living like a lord.

The effects of such good living soon became

evident. Before long the lad's lean, bony frame acquired a soft padding, his hands grew smooth and white, and his naturally broad shoulders became so huge that he could hardly get into his coat. And when one day he happened to glance into Eda's mirror—purely by chance, of course, for he was by no means vain—he could hardly recognize himself, so round and rosy and handsome was the face he saw there.

And it was not merely his outer self that had changed. He had always been a shy, modest, awkward lad with no thought in his head other than his swamp and ditches, his food and sleep. He had no time to think of anything else. Now he rapidly grew more alert and self-confident, and even began to think. He would stand leaning his elbows on the porch banister, contentedly sucking at his nose-warmer of a pipe, or loll about on the edge of the field watching the reapers at work and ponder over the great problems of life. The Father in Heaven must be wise indeed to have created men the way they were. Come to think of it, a man had something to enjoy every moment of his life. When he ate, it did his mouth and belly good; when he talked, his tongue rejoiced; when he listened, it was a pleasure to his ear; and if he looked it was a pleasure to his eye. The eye was very different from the belly. The belly could be filled and satis-

fied, but not so the eye. If something was pleasing to the eye you could look and look and never have your fill. Take those wide, straight, long ditches with the water running smoothly and steadily between their black banks—you could never get tired of watching them! Or beautiful girls, say. Yes, a beautiful girl—you could look at her and never look your fill. Funny, the idea had never occurred to him before. He had known Lize, and Jeva, and Liene—Koklap's servant girls—for quite a time, and his daughter Eda, too, yet never before had they pleased his eye. And now—now he couldn't take his eyes off them. Especially Eda. He would give anything in the world to be able to gaze at her twenty four hours a day. What a girl! Like a lime-tree in full bloom. And how strong she was! No load was too much for her. She could pick up three pails and run down to the well for water and back again as light as a bird. She was more than a match for any man, leave alone Spricis Vimba, her fiancé!

And Adam continued eating and drinking and lolling about and gazing at Eda, taking greater delight in her every day.

One day, as Eda set his bowl of pork before him, he took her hand.

"Well?" Eda asked, looking at the young giant.

He let go her hand.

"Nothing," he muttered in confusion.

"Why do you touch me if it's nothing?"

He plucked up his courage and raised his eyes, taking in her buxom, sturdy figure. His heart beat faster.

"I wish I could look at you always," he said. "I like you. I want to hold your hand and keep you near me."

Eda blushed. "The way you talk!" she said.

He sighed. "I've never seen a girl like you," he continued. "You'll be wedded soon, won't you?"

"Yes."

"You'll be wedded. Funny. I'll be sorry for you. But I suppose it has to be."

"Yes." And she left the room.

And Adam went on eating and drinking and staring at Eda. One day he seized her hand again.

"Do you like him?"

"Who?"

"That one . . . that young man of yours."

"Oh, him? We've known each other since we were little, and my parents want me to marry him. He used to come to our house, and he's such a jolly fellow, likes to fool around. Nobody had a word against him, and I—I thought, well, if I've got to marry him anyway—"

"But d'you like him?" Adam insisted.

"I don't know."

"You don't want to tell me the truth! Tell me!"

The girl said nothing for a while, then she whispered:

"He's so ugly, such a weakling compared to you. . . ."

After that conversation Adam lost his appetite altogether. Neither beer nor liquor spiced with wormwood could restore it. Koklap was almost sick with worry, and as was his wont, vented his fury on the servants. He beat up a boy for no reason whatever. But punishment followed quickly in the wake of injustice: the boy went straight to Adam and told him the whole story about the pig and why he was being kept here living "like a lord."

Adam's eyes widened, and he remained sitting motionless for half an hour, his bowl of pork before him, providing a stimulus to his thoughts, his head resting on his hands. At last he got up and went to look for Koklap.

"You swine!" he shouted. "I know all about that bet of yours. Reinis told me. Well, now you listen to me. Either you let me marry your daughter or I don't take another bite of your wretched pork. I nearly gave my soul up to the devil because of it, but I wouldn't mind doing it for Eda's sake, I love her so much I can't live without her."

Under other circumstances Koklap would have called in his lads and ordered them to tie Adam up, throw him in a cart, take him to the swamp and dump him there like so much rubbish. But now he first went pale, then red.

"But, man alive! You can't do that! Don't you know that Spricis—that Eda—"

"I know all about that," Adam interrupted him. "And I don't care a damn. I like your daughter. Are you going to give her to me or not?"

"But, Adam, my dear fellow, what is Spricis going to say?"

"What can that shrimp say?" The young Goliath laughed. "Let him only try and open his mouth, I'll show him what's what!" And seizing the burly farmer, he lifted him off the ground, shook him violently, and set him down again. "See? I'll crush him to powder!"

"Ouch!" Koklap groaned, rubbing his sides. "But what about the dowry? Spricis has taken her chest home."

"How's that? I thought he was going to live here."

"No, it was only announced that way so's the wedding feast should be on me, because his parents can't afford it just now."

"Oh, well, that doesn't matter. I'll be the bridegroom now, and I'll get the chest back!"

"Spricis won't give it to you."

"Oh, won't he? I'll bring it back with Spricis under the other arm!" Adam cried. "Or does he think Eda owes him something for his dear friendship, the worm? All right, I take charge of the debt. As soon as he gets married I'll repay it with interest if he wishes!"

"Adam, you're a regular brigand! I wasn't born yesterday, you know, but a thing like that.... Does my daughter want you?"

"She does!"

"Well, I'll have to think it over a day or two. Ah, that pig, that pig! It's bringing misfortune on me all right."

A few days went by and Koklap was still thinking it over, while Adam would not take a bite of meat, and the farmer's wife was in despair. Finally she sent for an old woman who knew how to overcome all sorts of difficulties, and Koklap, seeing that the game was up, finally gave in.

So Adam sat down to the pork again and went to Spricis Vimba's farm to fetch Eda's dowry.

Spricis was a harum-scarum kind of fellow and belonged to that very common type of man with whom love is only skin deep. To him one girl was much the same as another, and Eda a little more so because of their adjoining fields. When Adam explained to him very earnestly the reason for

his visit, colouring his story with a few thinly veiled threats, he was at first scared, for he thought the giant had gone off his onion. But when he saw that Adam was not even drunk, he just burst out laughing.

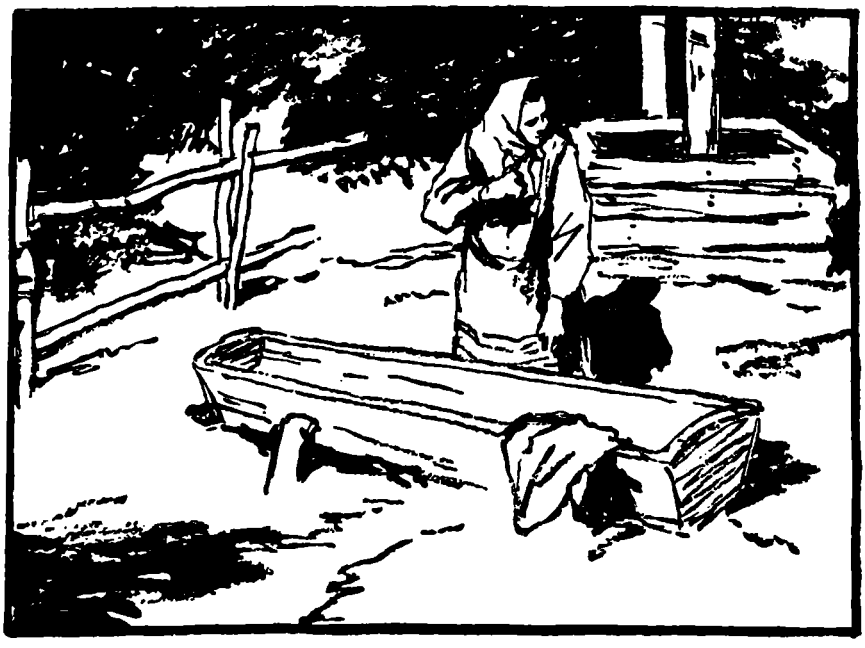
"Take her by all means!" he cried. "But don't blame me afterwards."

It was no easy job to make Spricis' parents return the dowry, but they, too, yielded when their son secretly assured them that Bamban's daughter Lize was sweet on him, and since Bamban was just as rich as Koklap, he might as well marry Lize.

And so Adam happily departed with Eda's dowry, finished off the pork with a renewed appetite, and in a short time the wedding was held.

Yet, he had to start by being a thrifty farmer, for that wedding was the first but by no means the last feast in the course of his happy wedded life.

1895



MONEY IN THE STOCKING

The wood splinter started smoking and was about to die down. It was wedged in a corner of the stove, around which the womenfolk of the Taurin farm were gathered spinning. The wheels were turning swiftly, filling the large servants' room with a steady cosy hum that had lulled the children and the men to sleep. Only one young lad was still up with the women, twisting yarn for *pastalas.*

"It's going out," he said, glancing at the dying flame. "Push the splinter down a bit, Ilze."

But Ilze could not hear him for the rattling of her spinning wheel, and calmly went on with her work. He got up, hung the wooden hooks he used for twisting the yarn on a peg, walked up to the stove, pulled the wood splinter out and kocked it on the hard clay floor to beat off its charred end. He took his time over it, and meanwhile the room was almost in complete darkness.

"What d'you think you're doing, Janis?" one of the women cried, jumping up and snatching the splinter out of his hand. "You're not very helpful!"

As the flame blazed up the woman caught a glimpse of Janis hastily pulling his hand away from Ilze's cheek. The lad awkwardly resumed his work, while Ilze rose and walked up to a bed screened off with a shawl. She drew the shawl aside and asked in a gentle voice:

"How are you feeling, Mother darling?"

"Much the same, dear.... Nothing really hurts me, but I've got no strength at all. I'd like a drink."

The girl took an earthenware cup off the window-sill and held it to her mother's lips.

"Ah, that's better, child. Now my tongue feels more like itself—'twas so dry. What's the matter

with the light? Give me your hand—there. Why is it so dark?"

The girl sat down on the edge of the bed, pressing her mother's wasted hand between both her own.

"Come closer."

The girl leaned towards her.

"I think I'm going to die soon."

"Don't talk of death, darling, you'll be well again, you'll see. The doctor said so too."

But the doctor had said just the opposite. Three weeks before, when her mother had fallen ill, Ilze had asked the farmer for a horse and cart and had gone to fetch the doctor. He had examined the sick woman and tried to cheer her up, telling her that there was nothing to worry about, that he would give her a medicine which would put her right in no time. But when Ilze drove him back he told her to be prepared for the worst, as her mother would never recover. The old woman must have felt that life was slipping away from her, for one day, choosing a time when she was alone in the room with Ilze, she had pulled two heavy stockings out from under her pillow and handed them to her daughter.

"This is your inheritance," she had said, "all I've managed to save up. Take it, my girl, for I haven't much longer to live." And then, once

again, in a low voice, she had told Ilze her story, so that the girl should profit by her experience.

A rich farmer's daughter, she had been beguiled by a handsome good-for-nothing into marrying him. He had taken her without love, merely for her money. He soon squandered everything on drink, and she had barely been able to save these three hundred silver rubles for her child, which she had stealthily guarded from everybody. "You never had any offers of marriage yet," she said, concluding her story. "But if it gets about that you have some money they'll be coming by the score. And there's sure to be one among these men who will catch your fancy, and be willing to marry you too—but only for the sake of your money. If you took such a man for a husband you'd be as miserable as I was in my day. So mark my words, my girl, don't tell anybody how much money you have. Then if a man asks you to marry him, it'll be because he likes you, and not just your money."

Ilze had taken the precious stockings, weeping bitterly, and had tried to comfort her mother, just as she was doing now, stroking her hand. But that hand had not been so thin then. Nor so cold. The longer Ilze held it in hers, the colder it seemed to grow. Suddenly, a shudder ran through her body.

"Janis, bring the light," she cried in a voice smothered with fear. "Quick!"

At that very moment the light went out, and the room was in pitch darkness. The spinning wheels stopped, and several voices cried out:

"What's the matter?"

From out of the corner came Ilze's tremulous reply, "I think Mother is dead."

Janis hastily struck a match and relighted the splinter. The women pushed their spinning wheels aside and got up. Janis went over to the bed with the lighted splinter. Yes, there lay Ilze's mother in her last sleep.

On the Sunday after the funeral Janis asked Ilze to step into the outhouse where the farmhands lived.

"Let's see how we stand," he said. As Ilze had no relatives, Janis, with farmer Taurin's permission, had taken charge of the funeral arrangements.

"Yes, let's," Ilze replied, and Janis gave her an account of all the expenses. Everything was right to a kopek, and there were still two rubles left over from the money Ilze had given him.

"Thank you, Janis. Thank you, dear, for all

your trouble," the girl said, locking the money away in her chest. "Really, all the funeral guests praised you so highly, and said you managed everything so well—just as if you were doing it for your own mother, and not just for a stranger."

"She hasn't been a stranger to me, has she?" Janis replied. "She mended my shirts and darned my socks for me." He sighed. "Who's going to do that for me now?"

"Somebody will, I'm sure," Ilze said, and for a while silence reigned in the outhouse.

"This chest is yours now," Janis resumed, bringing the flat of his hand down on the lid of the chest he was leaning against. "You've got two chests now."

"Yes, I've got two chests now."

"Rich girl."

Ilze smiled faintly.

"Rich? What d'you think there is in Mother's chest? A couple of blankets, some lengths of linen, two caps—a blue one and a red one—and a belt, that's all."

"Go on? And nothing more there, right down at the bottom?"

"What more could there be?"

"No stocking there, full of money?"

"A stocking?"

"D'you mean to say your mother hasn't left you any money at all?"

Ilze said nothing for a while. Then she answered:

"No, she hasn't."

"Go on! You can't fool me."

"You speak as if Mother told you she had money to leave me."

"I wouldn't say that, but then everyone knows your mother had money. Maybe people are just wagging their tongues, but surely you can trust me enough to tell me the truth. I won't tell anybody. You ought to know me well by this time, and what you mean to me.... You can trust me."

Janis broke off, searching Ilze's face anxiously, while his fingers drummed rapidly on the lid of the chest.

The blood rushed to Ilze's face. Why was he so keen to know how much money she had? It dawned on her suddenly that this was not the first time he had been trying to sound her about her money affairs. There must be something behind it! Ilze was reminded of her mother's advice.

And she said, "Don't you listen to what people say! Anyone would think Mother had asked them to count her money for her! All she left me was ten silver rubles."

"Ten . . . silver . . . rubles," Janis repeated, drawing the words out as if to give himself time to think. He looked crestfallen. "Ten rubles—that isn't much."

"And how much would you have her leave me!" Ilze wanted to cry out angrily, but she controlled herself, waiting to hear what else Janis would say. But he was silent, his eyes fixed on the ground.

"How much d'you think a poor tenant's widow can save up," Ilze said.

"True enough, but she was once a rich farmer's daughter, and I thought—I hoped—"

Janis left the sentence unfinished, dropping his eyes again, and walked out of the outhouse without raising them.

"He'd been hoping Mother would leave me a large dowry," Ilze said to herself. "The slyboots! Ah, he never really loved me!" And overwhelmed with grief, she leaned against the chest at the bottom of which lay two stockings stuffed with silver coins, and cried her heart out.

The wife of the rich farmer Lieldalderi had once said that Janis was a very handsome lad. Janis had returned the compliment by sending her a word that she was a very ugly old woman. After

her husband's funeral (he was buried a week after Ilze's mother) it was reported again to Janis that twice within a single week she had been heard to declare in the servants' room that Janis was the handsomest lad in the pagast. Here was an opportunity for Janis to return a left-handed compliment again, but he did not take it. He merely asked her farm-hand Andž, who had passed on to him his mistress' words, whether he was not pulling his leg, and when the boy assured him that he wasn't—why should he?—Janis grew thoughtful.

At church on the following Sunday he did not go up to the gallery, as he usually did, but, with a glance over the women's pews, took up a stand facing the Lieldalderi widow.

When the service was over Janis left the church together with her and greeted her outside. The rich widow graciously acknowledged his greetings and asked him how he was getting on.

He was very well, Janis replied.

He was standing at a respectful distance from her, while she was gazing at the passing churchgoers. As she said nothing more, and he could think of nothing to say either, he presently doffed his hat to her and went away.

Next Sunday, the Lieldalderi widow came to church alone, driving her own horse, and after the

service Janis untethered it for her and helped her into the sledge. A fortnight later he had occasion to repeat that act of courtesy. This time he was rewarded by the lady offering him her hand to press and saying she could give him a lift if he wanted. Why not? Janis got in and rode for a mile at the side of the gracious widow who would have taken him further had not their roads parted. On taking leave of him she had remarked that he might come down and have a look at her farm some day—he had probably never been there. Andž had just brewed some excellent beer, so why not make it Sunday next.

"I don't know if I'll manage it," Janis said, taking the proffered hand. "But I suppose I ought to call round some day. . . ."

All through the week Janis was unusually silent.

"What's the matter with Janis?" Ede, another of the Taurin servant girls, said to Ilze. "He's suddenly turned so sad and serious. He doesn't joke and fool around with us girls like he used to."

"He's worrying himself ill, trying to find a rich wife for himself," Ilze retorted.

She never suspected how very true it was.

Janis was such a long time in the steam-bath on Saturday night, scrubbing and rubbing himself down so furiously that the boys chaffed him, saying he'd scrape his hide off. He laughed back,

saying that was just what mischief-makers deserved, a proper hiding. But nobody knew what to make of that answer.

The next day Janis set out for the Lieldalderi farm.

In the servants' room three lads were sitting round a table playing cards. Janis knew them, and they gave him a friendly welcome, one of them immediately inviting him to sit down with them and take a hand to liven up the game.

He didn't mind if he did, Janis replied.

The four of them started their game.

Janis had expected his sudden visit to the Lieldalderi farm to arouse a great deal of curiosity, and, coming down, he had thought out a plausible answer anticipating all possible why's and wherefor's. But nobody seemed the least surprised. The three farm-hands took it for granted that he had come to see them, as is customary among friends.

"Is the mistress in?" Janis let fall casually as he was dealing out the cards. The house seemed to be very quiet.

"Yes," one of the lads replied, and another added, "Looks like she's expecting visitors. She was tidying and polishing her room up like mad all day Saturday, and this morning she washed and scoured herself as if she'd spent the week threshing."

Janis covered his face with his broad hand to hide his blush.

The mistress came out of her room in the afternoon and ordered lunch. On seeing Janis she feigned surprise, and exclaimed, "What wind has blown you in?" Then she retired to her room. Soon she reappeared in the doorway and said, "Won't our guest step in a bit further?" And without waiting for a reply she withdrew, leaving the door ajar.

Janis finished his game, then got up, saying, "Suppose I've got to go in once I'm called."

The lads followed him out with their eyes.

"What does she want of him?" one of them said.

"Maybe it was for him she's been smartening herself up?" said the other.

"And why not?" the third remarked. "He's a handsome devil all right, could turn the head of any young girl, leave alone an old hag like ours."

In the mistress' room the table was laid. On it stood a plate of wheaten cakes, butter and honey. The mistress sat at one end of the table, and at the opposite end stood an empty chair. She pointed to it, saying, "Take a seat."

Janis complied.

"Have some lunch," she added amiably, pushing up the bowl of honey that stood on Janis' side of the table.

Janis raised his broad hand to brush back a wisp of hair that had dropped over his forehead. His powerful chest heaved visibly. He looked nervously about the room and said:

"Is it lunch time already?"

"Half past one, just time to eat. But you don't seem a bit hungry! Would you like a drop of something—I'll get you a drink," she said, half-rising.

"No, no, don't trouble!" Janis exclaimed. "I don't drink." And picking up his knife, he tapped the table with it and plunged on:

"I can't eat until I've got it off my chest. It seems to me you think kindly of me.... You're not beautiful, but you've got a good heart. You know me, I know you. If you want to marry me, I'm willing. What do you say?"

There! It was off his mind at last; the words had been weighing on it like so many stones all the week.

He put the knife down and pressed his hand to his head so that it covered his eyes.

She gazed somewhat abashed at the handsome blushing lad.

"Do you want to know my mind?" she said cheerfully. "Well—I wouldn't mind having a boy like you for a husband at all!"

She laughed a thrilled happy laugh. Reaching across the table, she grasped Janis' hand and pulled it gently away from his face.

"Don't be so bashful! It's all right now! Oh, how rough your hand is, darling! But we'll soon get it smooth as a gentleman's. You won't have to do any rough work on the Lieldalderi farm!"—and the infatuated widow fondled the rough hand, until Janis raised his eyes and looked straight at her. It was an odd glance. There was not a tear in his eyes, and yet they looked moist. She let go his hand and said: "And now—eat!"

Halfway through the meal Janis asked whether he could sample the beer she had praised so highly. She blushed and said with a laugh:

"Oh, the beer! Well, now that you're my fiancé I must tell you the truth: we don't have any. I made it all up, so you should come sooner."

The world marvelled at Janis' incredible good luck. The world envied him, and there was not a young bachelor farm-hand but wished himself in his place. And so they must have been tears of joy which he shed on his wedding night, when he slipped out into the garden, while indoors candles

were burning brightly, glasses were clinking, musicians were playing, and gay voices were proposing the health of the "young couple."

Janis was thirty-eight when his wife died in her sixty-second year. They had spent together eighteen peaceful years of married life, during which period Janis' hands had indeed grown smooth. But while his hands were smooth, his forehead was lined. The best years of his life had passed at the side of a withered wife. Yet never had he uttered a word of complaint. "We've all got to take the rough with the smooth, even dukes and kings—leave alone a common peasant lad like myself," he would say, when his friends—the very same who had once envied his good luck—asked him how he could be so content with an old wife like his. "She couldn't have married me against my wishes, could she? But for her I'd never have seen all this wealth and a lot more besides. Is it for me to storm and rave because I got what I wanted? There are plenty of rotters who marry rich elderly wives and then carry on as if they hadn't known how old and ugly they were until after the wedding. They suddenly start moping, the goofs, and make fools of themselves, showing the world how

good they are at pouring down their throats the property they hadn't lifted a finger to acquire. Well, I'm not going to be one of them."

This was not merely sensible talk. He had been a steady sensible husband throughout his married life, not counting the first year when he had tippled once in a while.

Janis did not cry when his wife died, but neither did he rejoice. The love she had offered him eighteen years before had not diminished till the last day of her life. They had hardly ever quarrelled. And the bowl of honey, which she had placed at his end of the table when she first entertained him as her guest, had never moved from its place. Even on her death-bed she was full of concern for his well-being. "Janis dear," she had said one day, "when I'm dead you must get married again. She mustn't be too young, though. Take a wife of your own age, so that you shouldn't be worrying in case she tires of you."

The words betrayed the secret sorrow that had marred her happiness, and they came to Janis' mind every time he considered a girl as a prospective bride. For marry he must—a man whose thick mop of hair time had not touched with a single silver strand; a childless widower with a large farm on his hands!

But who of all the girls he knew would be a

suitable match for him? "The youngest and prettiest!" his heart cried out with a quickened beat. "Remember your late wife's words!" reason rejoined. At last Janis came to a Solomonic decision: "She must not be too young, but she need not be ugly."

But where was one to find a girl who was still pretty though getting on in years?

He went over in his mind all the "old maids" he knew, and found none to whom his heart could warm. Stale goods were stale goods! Either time had spoiled her beauty, or she "had had her day." Sometimes it was both.

Then Ilze came to his memory. Ilze.... He wondered where she was. What had become of her? He had tried hard to put her out of his mind, and had finally succeeded. He made inquiries here and there and learned that she was serving at the Volk farm, which was in a neighbouring pagast, and that she had, in the natural course of time, become an "old maid." A pang shot through his heart at the thought of her. Was not the finger of heaven in it? What if he tried to rid her of that odious appellative? Who knew through whose fault she had come by it! Why not, unless she had gone too old and ugly!

So Janis shaved, put on his Sunday best, and had his finest horse harnessed with a bell attached to the shaft. And off he drove.

Ilze, Ilze, did you feed your dog so it should not bark at your suitor?

When Janis drove into the Volk farm Ilze was standing in the middle of the yard rinsing the washing. The dog started barking, but Ilze silenced it.

"That was her voice, horsie," Janis said to his bay while tethering it. "The voice is much the same, now let's see the face."

He approached Ilze and said in an even voice: "God speed you!"

"Thank you," Ilze answered in the same impassive tone, barely looking up at him, and deftly resuming her task.

"Not so young as she used to be," Janis thought. "But she could pass. I've got more wrinkles on my forehead than she has." He scanned her face with cold curiosity, his heart never quickening its beat. And he had loved her so passionately!

"What are you washing in such a hurry?" he said, coming up closer.

"My bridal sheets," Ilze answered, continuing with her rinsing.

Bridal sheets! Lucky words that had sprung thoughtlessly to her lips! Words in jest—just mere words!

But to Janis they came as timely aid. He had been at his wit's end how to broach the subject of

his marriage with Ilze, but she had made it easy for him now.

"Bridal sheets!" he repeated. "Well, if that isn't a coincidence! I'm just searching the neighbourhood for a housewife for myself. Seems I've come to the right place. So your dowry is ready. And what about you? Are you ready to come along?"

"I'm ready all right!"

"Fine! When do we drive to church?"

"The sooner the better. My hair isn't grey yet, but who knows what it'll be like tomorrow!" And she laughed as she wrung out a towel, gave it a shake and tossed it into a tub filled with wrung-out washing.

"Where's your master?" Janis asked.

"In his room."

"I see. Well, finish your work while I talk to him, and come in as soon as you're through."

Janis entered the farmhouse.

"I wonder what's brought him here?" Ilze thought, heaving a sigh as memories of days gone by came surging back.

Seeing Janis driving into his yard farmer Volk had called out to his daughter Jeva to slip into her best gown, and put clean pillow-cases on her pillows and place them on top of the blankets.

The two farmers exchanged greetings and talked for a while of this and that, as farmers do on

such occasions, until Janis asked at length whether farmer Volk guessed what evil designs had brought him down.

How should he, Volk replied with a snigger.

"I've come to steal a girl from you."

Dear, dear, how odd, how very odd—only last night he had dreamt that a wolf had stolen a lamb from him. Ah, well, it couldn't be helped.

Would he call the girl in, the guest remarked. What could she be doing so long—all the washing must have been wrung out by now and hung up to dry.

The washing? He must be mistaken. What washing? She was in the other room, knitting. "Jeva, my girl, come in!"

Jeva came in, blushing, not daring to raise her eyes.

"Will you kindly call Ilze in, my dear—she's said to be knitting in the other room!" Janis said politely.

"Ilze?" Volk exclaimed. "Oh, yes, of course, Ilze.... Go call her in, my girl. She must be in the cowshed."

Jeva went out, and presently Ilze entered the room.

"Jeva said you wanted to see me," she said a little bashfully, stopping in the doorway.

"Yes, I wanted farmer Volk to meet my bride,"

Janis said. "And while we're at it, we might fix the day we're going to church."

Ilze looked from one to the other.

"I really don't know what you're talking about," she said.

"What's there to know? You promised me a moment ago to go home with me as my wife, didn't you?" Janis said, laughing. "Or have you changed your mind already?"

"Did you really mean it?" Ilze asked, and her voice shook.

"I did, every bit of it."

"Well, I say yes, then, and mean it too."

Volk left Janis and Ilze alone and withdrew to the other room where Jeva had dutifully resumed her knitting. He spat on the floor, disgusted.

Soon afterwards the wedding took place. Once more there was music in the farmhouse, which was filled with merry wedding guests, but no tear of joy was shed in the Lieldalderi garden.

The festivities over, and everything having dropped back into its customary rut, the young husband took his wife by the hand and showed her over the house and farm with all its property which was now hers. He showed her the stables with

their five sleek horses and one colt, the cattle-sheds that housed twenty cows, four calves and a flock of sheep, the barn whose bins were bursting with grain, and asked her with a pleased smile:

"Well, dear, how does it feel to be the rich mistress of a farm when only a month ago you were a poor servant girl?"

Ilze smiled back and said, taking Janis' hand:

"You've shown me my property, now come along and see yours!" And she took her husband to the outhouse, unlocked her chest and began pulling out sheets, underwear, towels, gloves and stockings without number, and finally produced from the very bottom two stockings stuffed full with silver coins.

"What is this?" Janis said, astounded.

"Money. I'm not so poor as you thought I was," Ilze replied, beaming with happiness and pride. "And that's not all. I've given the pastor two hundred rubles to put in the bank for me."

Janis stared at her dumbfounded. "Ilze, how on earth did you manage to save up all that money?"

"They aren't all my own savings. The money in the stockings I inherited from Mother."

"Go on! I remember you told me your mother had left you only ten rubles."

"I was lying—Mother had left me three hundred."

"Oh!" The cry was wrung from Janis, as he leaned heavily against the chest.

Ilze caught his hand, startled.

"What's the matter?"

"Ilze," he said sorrowfully, "Ilze, do you know what your lies have done? I meant to marry you after your mother died. I loved you so, and I thought you loved me too. Didn't you know I was to be conscripted? At that time it was enough for a man to be a tenant farmer to exempt him from military service. If you had told me the truth, we could have got married and rented a little farm. That's why I kept asking you whether you had any money. When you told me you hadn't any, and I saw you couldn't do anything to keep me out of the army, I felt ever so bad. I had to give you up. I couldn't help myself. 'Twas more than a wife I needed, I needed somebody to save me. That's why I took the Lieldalderi widow."

He handed the heavy stocking back to Ilze, who had gone as white as a sheet. She took it from him, sank on to a bale of linen, tied up the stocking, and with hands clasped in her lap, sat motionless, staring down at the ground.

"Why didn't you tell me the reason you were so curious about my money?" she said at length in a deadened voice. "My answer would have been different then."

"But, darling, you knew I was liable for military service! And after I'd asked you so earnestly, begged you so hard to trust me—how could I imagine you wouldn't tell me the truth!"

Ilze rose and turned towards the chest.

"Oh, what a fool I am," she muttered, and suddenly, overwhelmed with grief and rage, she lifted the stocking and flung it into the chest so that it burst open and the silver rubles rolled clinking and clattering over the bottom.

"Hateful money, I'll drown you, I'll bury you!" And she covered her face with her apron and wept bitterly.

1889

ODD MAN OUT

Barefooted, bare-armed but for an inch of shirt sleeve that scarcely covered her shoulder, dressed in a short skirt, she was standing outside the kitchen door on a sunny summer day, scouring and rinsing the milk dishes, when the forest keeper entered the yard.

"Good afternoon!"

"Good afternoon!"

"The farmer in?"

"Yes."

"In the house?"

"Don't know. Ask the mistress."

Instead of asking where the mistress was, he lingered, contemplating Ilze. From her pink-and-white face his eyes slid down to her breast, and came to rest on her legs. He smiled. Catching that smile she pushed a stray curl behind her ear and said:

"What are you laughing at?"

"Oh, nothing."

"Why d'you look at me like that?"

"Don't you like it?"

"Like it? I don't care how you look! The mistress is in the outhouse there, churning butter."

"So you don't like me to look at you! All right, I'll go away if you wish!"

With the smile still hovering on his lips, he turned on his heel and crossed the yard towards the outhouse Ilze had pointed to.

The girl went on with her work, but her eyes involuntarily followed the retreating figure.

So that was him! Rather short, broad in the shoulders, and as for his face.... Well, people did like to talk a lot of nonsense! Fancy calling him handsome! The pale complexion of a drunkard, a wide mouth, grey eyes that had a cold insolent

look in them, and—well, yes, his nose *was* nicely shaped, and his teeth were fine too. But nothing to get excited about! Ha! Ilze laughed to herself. Fancy warning all the girls! How ridiculous! Really!

After a while he emerged from the outhouse.

"Good-bye, young lady!" he shouted to her across the yard, doffing his hat. Despite the challenging, mocking ring in his voice, there was a peculiar grace about the broad swinging movement of his arm as he flourished his hat. Never before had Ilze been greeted with such courtesy.

"Good-bye!" she replied, and for all her affected indifference her head turned after him before he had gone five steps. How proudly he walked, with that light swinging movement. You could tell at once that he moved among gentlefolk. What a difference between him and Ješka with his slow clumsy tread—clump, clump! And how smartly that green uniform sat on his figure. So neat and clean it was, too, as if it had come straight out of the wardrobe. If what people said was true—that he used to get dead drunk and sprawl about on the floor at the inn—that suit of his didn't show it.

She put the clean dishes away to dry, and turned round to find Ješka standing by her washing tub. His sweaty face was crimson, and his huge

broad hands were smeared with gum. His small blue eyes strayed as if in search of something unusual and he asked, slowly drawing out each word:

"What did he want, that forest keeper?"

Ilze dipped a bunch of straw into the white sand and proceeded to scour the pail.

"Came to see the master," she replied.

"He talked to you?"

"He did."

"What . . . er . . . what about?"

"Nothing much. . . . Just this and that."

"Did he stay long?"

"The questions you ask! Of course not! Less than you've been standing here now."

The lad took off his straw hat and passed his shirt sleeve across his sweaty face.

"I've come for some water. We got thirsty working over there by the shed. Any water in the kitchen?"

"Plenty. But ask the mistress, she may give you some butter-milk."

Ješka went into the kitchen to have a drink of water, then strode down the same path the forest keeper had taken a little while before.

His was a clumsy gait. Although he was in his prime, he did not seem at all conscious of his strength, and that habit of drawing his head into his shoulders gave him a meek and even humble

sort of look. Ilze now saw this more clearly than ever as she followed him with her eyes.

A few days later the forest keeper came again. The farm people were cutting the early clover and housing it in the newly-built barn. He shouted a greeting to everybody, and went towards Ilze.

"Oh, it's you!" he said, feigning surprise. "How are you doing?" And he raised his hat ever so slightly, but with a subtle elegance and grace.

Turning to the farmer, he asked him if he had seen anyone driving a horse and cart the previous night. Two fine ash-trees had been stolen from the estate forest close by. Nobody had seen anything, and after exchanging a few words with the farm people, the forest keeper took his leave. Passing Ilze on his way out, he flashed an audacious smile at her as his cold eyes met hers, then put two fingers to his cap, military-fashion, and went by in silence. A little distance from her he began to whistle and soon his comely figure vanished in the bushes.

"What does he mean hanging around here like this?" Ješka muttered. "He'd better look out or he'll get it in the neck!"

"It's his job to hunt out poachers," someone remarked. "He's the forest keeper, isn't he!"

"Let him mind his own business, then, and not

go poking his nose into other people's business. He'd better look out. I know what he's up to."

"What is he up to?"

"Never you mind!"

On the following Sunday a letter was delivered at the Rindnieki farm inviting all the ladies and gentlemen of the neighbourhood to a ball to be held Sunday week at the Kulis farm (in the beautiful birch-wood by the lake). The letter was signed "respectfully, Janis and Anton."

"I wonder who's getting up this ball?" someone asked when the letter was read out.

"Didn't you hear? It's signed by the Kulis boys —Janis and Anton," Ilze said.

"Nonsense! Janis has a wife and children, he wouldn't bother with that sort of thing, and Anton hasn't got a kopek to bless himself with. Who d'you think is going to pay the musicians?"

"Old farmer Kulis," Ješka interposed. "He is great friends with the forest keeper, and the forest keeper has a sweetheart at the Kulis farm, so he's arranging it and farmer Kulis is footing the bill."

"It looks like it," said Made, the wife of a young farm-hand. "Last year the forest keeper signed the invitations. I got one myself."

"So he's a sweetheart there, has he?" Ilze suddenly remarked.

"Does it matter much?" Ješka said pointedly. Ilze did not answer.

Every day after that the subject of the Kulis farm always seemed to crop up naturally during the conversation without Ilze ever starting it or the others displaying any special interest. And so Ilze heard diverse opinions about the forest keeper's sweetheart, of whom some spoke highly, others scornfully.

She wondered what she was really like, and decided in her own mind that she must be very beautiful after all, for would not a man whose business took him through all the neighbourhood choose the best he could find! She opened her chest and went through all her prettiest summer garments. What should she wear on Sunday? The cream-coloured skirt with the yellow blouse, or the pink one with the white blouse and pink ribbons? The pink one suited her best, she finally decided. And so, on Sunday morning she carefully rinsed and ironed her white blouse making it look like new.

"Dressing up for tonight's ball?" Ješka asked, watching her hanging up her dress.

"Yes!"

"So you're going?"

"Of course, why not? Juris is going, and so is Made although she's a married woman. Aren't you going?"

"Me? . . . er . . . I'll see when the time comes."

When the time came he polished up his top boots, shaved his ginger beard, carefully twisted the ends of his thick moustache, put on his new buckskins and joined the others on their way to the Kulis farm.

"Smart boy, our Ješka, when he turns out like this," Made said. "As spruce as an onion! If I weren't married I'd take him for a husband any day. Straigten your back, you clumsy bear!" And she playfully slapped him on the back, which only made him hunch his shoulders still more.

"I know, I know," he mumbled. "You only talk like that because you're safely married. If you were a girl you'd run away from me just like the others do."

"Who does?"

"Why, the whole lot of them. Every one."

"Why don't you run after them? If I were a lad like you I'd have all the girls mad for me, I would!" Made laughed. "Just look at the forest keeper. A regular good-for-nothing, yet there isn't a girl he couldn't have for the asking. Why, I'd just love to dance with him myself! There's an example for you, my boy!"

"The forest keeper! He's got me beat!" Ješka said meekly, and his eyelids fluttered as he averted his gaze.

Ilze lagged behind the others in silence.

The dance floor was fairly crowded with boys and girls. In couples, or in small groups of three and four they strolled along the lake and through the birch-wood, or sat around the smooth dance floor on wooden benches.

After an exchange of greetings with the Kulis farm-hands, Ilze sat down with Made on one of the benches and cast expectant glances around her, while the men lingered to talk with Janis and Anton.

"The forest keeper's here too," she remarked casually after a short silence.

"Where?"

"Over there by the three birches."

Made followed the direction and saw him reclining against the white trunk of a birch-tree, his legs sprawling, his left arm round the waist of a girl in a red blouse. He watched the passing couples with a supercilious smile, occasionally leaning over to his partner and apparently addressing some amusing remark to her, for she would burst out laughing, demurely pressing a white handkerchief to her lips.

Suddenly he raised his head, and Ilze felt that

he had noticed her. He relaxed for a moment into his former lounging attitude, then rose abruptly and made straight for Ilze and Made.

"Good evening!" he exclaimed while still at a distance. He raised his hat and held it in his outstretched arm for a moment, then sauntered up to them in his slow swinging stride. He shook hands with both women, and Ilze, disconcerted by the emphatic pressure of his hand, dropped her eyes.

He sat down beside her.

"Well, young lady, see how jolly it is in our pagast," he said to make conversation. "And you people haven't gone out anywhere this spring, I hear! Have you been to a dance yet?"

"No, not yet," Ilze said, collecting her scattered wits. "But I don't see much gaiety here either."

"Don't judge too soon! Wait till the musicians strike up!"

"Has there been any dancing yet?" Made asked.

"No, not yet."

"Really? Why so late?"

"I couldn't open the ball."

"Are you supposed to open it? Oh, of course, you're like the young lord here. But why couldn't you start the dancing?"

"Because my partner hadn't arrived."

"Fibs! We saw you sitting and cuddling."

"We may have been sitting together, but we didn't dance!"

"I see! She wasn't the one—is that it? Is she here now?"

"She is. I mean, I hope you won't refuse me, young lady.... Will you do me the honour of opening the ball with me?" He rose to his feet, bowed to Ilze, and proffered her his hand.

"Will you, please?"

"I don't know, really. I'm not a good dancer. . . ." the girl stammered, blushing furiously.

"Oh, it's all right! Do me the favour, young lady!"

"But really... I have danced so little.... I'll get the steps all mixed up...."

"Never mind. You won't touch the ground in my arms. Only say yes."

"Very well ... yes."

She put her hand in his, and again he gave it a squeeze, doffing his hat at the same time.

"Will you promise me the next dance too?"

"Oh, but ... but won't that be too much," Ilze murmured.

"Please, don't refuse me!"

"But really, it's too much."

"I won't let your hand go till you've promised."

"Then I suppose I have to."

"Thank you."

He pressed her hand and doffed his hat again, and went off to have a word with the musicians.

"That one in the red blouse will be wild," Made remarked, looking in the direction of the three birches where the girl was still sitting.

Ilze shrugged her shoulders.

After a while Ješka came up and sat down at Made's side.

"Quite a crowd," he said. "Look, they're getting ready to dance."

"Have you a partner for the first dance?" Made asked.

"Not yet. Plenty of time."

"Plenty of time indeed! You'd better hurry up. Others have engaged their ladies for three and four dances ahead."

"Is that so? Who has? I daresay I'd better —" He broke off, so utterly confused that he did not know what to do with himself. He dug his heel into the ground, then pounded his fist against the bench, and finally propped his elbows on his knees, rested his head in his cupped hands, and stared hard at the grass for a while before he awkwardly resumed:

"I don't suppose I'll have to look far. I mean . . . Ilze, you haven't got a partner yet, have you?"

"Of course she has," Made interjected before the girl could answer. "That's what I'm telling you—some have thought well ahead."

"Who . . . who might that be?"

"The forest keeper, for one."

"Mm!" he mumbled, and lapsed into silence. Ilze rose to join a passing group of girls.

"Why didn't you speak to her on the way here if you wanted to dance with her?" Made said. "Honestly, Ješka, you can't handle these matters at all."

His gentle blue eyes grew misty and he stared across the dance floor towards the sun-bathed tops of the birch-trees, saying in a muffled voice:

"Ah, well, I suppose you're right! All I'm good for is ploughing and harrowing. . . . I think I'd better go home."

"What! Why, you're— Now, look here, don't you start sulking! Remember what I said just now? If a girl runs away from you, you must run after her! Why don't you go after her and ask her for the next dance? Go on, hurry up!" And jumping up she pulled him to his feet and gave him a vigorous push.

The dancing began. To the strains of a concertina and a fiddle, the forest keeper led the blushing Ilze into the centre of the dance floor. All eyes were riveted on them, and for a while they

danced alone. Then others joined them, and by and by the floor was thronged with whirling couples.

Ješka stood leaning against a birch-tree, watching the motley crowd. Among the maze of white, red, yellow, and striped blouses he saw only one, floating here and there, disappearing and reappearing by the side of a green hat.

He clenched his fists. The rotter! . . . the good-for-nothing . . . so he had spoilt it all for him. And he could do nothing to help himself!

Ilze meanwhile was swaying blissfully in the forest keeper's arms.

"Enough! I can't!" she cried at last, panting.

"One more round," he said, and again she floated in his strong embrace, barely touching the ground.

Next he danced with the girl in the red blouse, and then with some other girl, and again with Ilze, never tiring, his movements as light, his arms as strong as in the first dance, his breath hot upon her face.

After a brief interval, the next dance was announced. The dancers lined up in pairs, and again Ješka remained sitting by himself. In vain did Made urge him to join the dance. He seemed obstinately bent on sitting there all the evening without budging.

"Your sweetheart will be angry with you for dancing with me all the time," Ilze said archly

after the first round. "This dance should have been hers!"

"Who do you mean?" he said. "I have no sweetheart."

"And that one in red?"

"That one! Oh, she's just a good friend."

"So you're not engaged?"

He laughed. "Is that so hard to believe? If you don't believe, it's no use me trying to reassure you. But if you want me to be truthful—there's nothing more I can say."

"Well, even if she is just a friend you ought to have offered her this dance."

"But what if I have lots like her.... Lots of good friends—what am I to do? As I can't very well invite them all, isn't it wiser not to invite any?"

"Lots, did you say!"

His grey eyes met hers searchingly, and his white teeth gleamed, but the expression of his face was neither lustful nor covetous as he whispered:

"I can't help it if the girls like me, can I?"

"Oh, so you ... you think...."

"I certainly do! At least, I hope so..." he said, starting a new figure, and gripping the girl's fingers so hard that it hurt her.

The dance was followed by a polka, after which a ladies' polka was announced. Looking about for a partner, Ilze chanced upon Made.

"You only dance with the forest keeper now," Made said. "Everybody's whispering about you. You might take someone else for a change, you've done enough hopping around with him."

"What makes you say that?" Ilze said, looking surprised. "I dance with everybody. I'm just choosing a partner, haven't made up my mind yet." She knew very well what it meant to have the gossips associate her name with the forest keeper's, and yet her heart thrilled at the thought of it. In that state of mind she came across Ješka, who was still sitting on the bench, utterly dejected.

"What's wrong with you?" she cried gaily. "I haven't seen you budge all the evening! Why, you're cowering there like an old fogey who's afraid his bones will rattle if he dances. Come on, get a move!"

"It's up to the ladies now," Ješka said slowly. "I can't invite you to this dance."

"And when it was up to you, where were you then? Lounging about just the same. Come on, get on your feet." She seized his hand and whirled him off so swiftly that her pink ribbons fluttered about him before he could realize that he had decided not to dance at all that night.

"You're so easy to dance with," he murmured happily.

"So are you," she said. He did not dance half

so well as the forest keeper. But how timidly and tenderly he held her in his arms! As if he were afraid of her. If his left hand were not so hot she would hardly have known it was holding hers.

After the ladies' polka there was a long interval, and then Anton instead of the forest keeper announced the next dance. It opened just as the sun was setting beyond the lake. Dance followed dance and Ilze saw nothing of the forest keeper. She suddenly felt tired and drifted down to the lake. From the birch-wood, where the young couples were strolling about arm in arm, came the hum of gay voices mingled with bursts of laughter. Ilze bent down and scooped up some water to bathe her burning forehead. Then she sat down under the bushes.

Suddenly a man came out of the wood, stood still for a moment gazing about him and walked straight towards her. It was the forest keeper.

"A white flower by the lake," he cried gaily. "I've been looking for you all over. I've stopped about a dozen white blouses thinking it was you. How are you feeling?"

"Enough dancing for me," Ilze said.

"Then let's take a stroll," he said, leaning very close, his head almost touching hers. He was chewing a twig of fir, but she could smell liquor in his breath.

"It's too late. I ought to be going. The others will be waiting for me, we arranged not to stay too late."

She got up, and he jumped to his feet.

"Just a little walk," he pleaded, slipping his arm round her waist and drawing her along. Ilze's heart beat faster.

"Not like this," she protested, trying to disengage his arm. But he was holding her tight.

"There now, why not?" he pleaded, resting his head on her shoulder. "It's dark.... Nobody will see us."

"All the same.... I don't want to walk like this...."

"Don't you? Don't you like it?"

"No."

"That sounded like 'yes.' You know, the moment I saw you I was smitten to the heart. You looked so ... so.... I liked you at once. I can see you now, the way you stood there when we first met: with bare legs, and arms, and half-covered breasts...."

"It isn't true!" she broke in, blushing.

"It is," he rejoined, and suddenly withdrawing his arm he kissed her. "It is true, isn't it?"

"Oh!" she gasped.

"What?"

"Let us go back."

"No—not yet."

"No, no, no!"

"But why?"

"Just—no!"

"Oh, nonsense, come along!"

"No!"

He grasped her arm, and she struggled to wrench it free.

"I'm not going. Don't try to force me!"

"How stubborn you are!" he said softly, and caught her in his arms, covering her cheeks, her eyes, her mouth with ardent kisses.

"Let me go! I'll . . . I'll scream!"

"Do!" he said and with a loud "O-hoi!" he pressed the girl passionately to him. "I love you . . . love you . . . love you. . . . I. . ."—and he suddenly gathered her up in his arms and whirled round and round, kissing her blouse, her neck. For a moment she lay in his arms, dazed, then, gathering all her strength, she broke away and ran back to the dance floor.

Since that incident by the lake Ilze could not get rid of a strange uneasy feeling. Deep down in her heart she felt that she ought to resent the forest keeper's insolent behaviour, feel ashamed, or insulted. But she could not. His passion seemed

to have kindled in her a tingling fire that had run through all her veins, and she cherished the memory of it as a sweet secret that bore the promise of some immense, ineffable bliss, at once frightening and alluring.

When she was in the field, the slightest snap of a twig or the sudden barking of a dog made her start and turn her head in eager anticipation. She never doubted the genuineness of his feeling, and every moment of the day she waited for him to come to her. The flame of desire that he had kindled in her must be burning in him as well. What's more, the estate was close by. But Wednesday came round, Friday followed, and there was still no sign of him. Then anger burned up in her. So he had just been trifling with her, had dropped her as light-heartedly as he dropped that girl in the red blouse on the dance floor! Oh, people were right—he *was* a rake and she ought to beware of him. And she listened to the gossip about him and his misdeeds with bitter glee, ready to add to it a word of her own.

On Sunday morning she gave Ješka a friendly slap on the hand and asked him whether he was going to church. Yes, he had been intending to go. So they went to church together. Later, when they all sat down to dinner, Made remarked casually

that she had seen the forest keeper pass by that morning.

"Mm!" Ješka uttered unperturbed, for under the spell of Ilze's friendly proximity the forest keeper just dwindled to nothing. In Ilze's heart, however, these words raised a storm of emotion. The food stuck in her throat, and, making up some excuse, she got up and went out of the room. So he had been trying to see her! And she had doubted him and given her attentions to another man! Suddenly she blushed as if the forest keeper's grey eyes were upon her, and she could see his lips curl in a cold mocking smile.

Once more it was Sunday. Ilze had spent the week as in a dream. She was standing in the outhouse getting ready to drive the cattle out to the pastures. She checked a momentary impulse to put on her white blouse, but she could not refrain from dressing more carefully than she usually did on a Sunday. Coming out of the outhouse she met Ješka, whose turn it was to graze the horses.

"Which way are you going?" he asked, obviously seeking her company.

Ilze was furious. She had been so moody and unkind to him all the week, and here he was addressing her as sweetly as ever!

"To the Long Pastures," she said curtly. Very

well, let him come with her and spoil the meeting she so passionately desired; let her happiness go to the winds—it would not be her fault. And clenching her teeth, she drove her cattle out of the shed.

Ješka took the same direction with his horses, whistling away happily as he walked. He made a little basket out of the bark of a tree and started picking wild strawberries for Ilze.

At noon the dog began to bark, and the forest keeper appeared on the edge of the pastures just where Ilze was sitting. His manner, as he greeted her, was as pleasantly courteous, his gait, as he approached her, as proudly swaying and lithe as she remembered it. He was about to fling himself down on the grass beside her, but she jumped to her feet.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked surprised.

"I'm not alone," she replied. "There's Ješka over there behind the bushes. . . ."

"What the hell's he doing there?"

"Grazing the horses."

"Oh, I see. All right, let him. He's not in my way."

"No, I don't want."

"Well, I declare! I missed you terribly these last two weeks, and now you. . . ."

"But he can see and hear us!" she cried. "I don't want him to!"

He stood silent, biting his lips.

"Can't we meet, just the two of us?" he said, dropping his voice to a whisper. "There's so much I have to tell you! Couldn't we meet somewhere all alone?"

He looked at her closely with his grey eyes, which had not closed in sleep the previous night and in which the fire of passion still smouldered. The inflamed eyelids, the blue circles round his eyes, his whole haggard appearance could not subdue his habitual expression of proud recklessness.

"What shall I do? Oh, what shall I do?" Ilze murmured.

She looked calm as she stood there facing him, but her eyes passed restlessly from his lean face to the shapely slender fingers of his hands, from his gun down to his well-polished boots, and back to his face again. There was something irresistible in his lean face the pallor of which she attributed partly to herself, partly to some obscure reason which at once repelled and attracted her. In a flash she seemed to re-live the delirious moments of that memorable night by the lake. Oh, to be clasped like that in his arms again and pressed to that broad manly chest! She would give half

her life for one such moment. But Ješka was there picking strawberries.

"What about the outhouse where the farmhands live—does anybody sleep there?" he asked.

"No."

"Nobody? Well then, we might... we could talk there without being disturbed. Tomorrow night, yes?"

"Tomorrow night? No, oh no!"

"But when? Say yes for tomorrow!"

"No!"

"Yes, let's!"

"But what if.... Say anything happens to prevent me?"

"Then just strip all the leaves off the lower branch of the oak-tree at the back of the outhouse to let me know. Good-bye!"

Ješka was returning with his strawberries, and the forest keeper hastily took his leave.

Had anyone told Ilze only a week before that a meeting with the forest keeper at any place or time would put her out in the slightest degree, she would have either laughed at the idea, or would have been indignant. Yet now she was deeply perplexed. The first surge of joy was smothered by a spasm of fear and shame, and she

made up her mind to strip the branch that very night. Then the yearning to be with him burned up anew in her, overruling all former decisions, only to give place again to fears and doubts.... She slept poorly that night, torn between conflicting emotions. On Monday she went with the others to stack hay, and was too busy to indulge in her thoughts, but when evening came she could barely control her excitement. She strolled down to the oak-tree at the back of the outhouse and laid her hand on its lower branch. One movement, and it would all be finished, done with! But as she stood there staring at the scalloped leaves she felt sure that she would not tear off a single leaf. She let her hand drop. Come what may!

Back in the living room she complained that the stuffy air gave her a headache (lucky for her they had been baking bread), and taking her blanket and pillow, she retired to the outhouse. The clock struck ten.

When silence reigned in the servants' room, Ilze slipped out, quietly called to the dog and locked it up in the barn to keep it from barking when he came. Then she flew back to the outhouse, her heart pounding, and dropped down on a chest with a sigh of relief. He would come between ten and eleven—he might be on his way now, she thought. Perhaps he was standing by

the oak-tree at that very moment. She quivered with excitement. She had said no! to him, yet he was sure to have felt how eager she was to meet him. Now he would be still more audacious in his behaviour towards her. She listened to the silence. Did she hear him jump over the fence? Was that his step? No, not yet.... The minutes passed, the clock struck eleven.

Something must have happened to delay him, Ilze thought in an agony of suspense, her heart pounding wildly as she strained her ears to listen. She got up, walked over to the door and peered out into the night. Not a sound, except for the lazy munching of the cows, and the occasional bleating of a lamb. She sat down on the chest again. What if he did not come? But no, that could not be, he had made the appointment himself, he had been so eager about it! It wasn't nice of him, though, to keep her waiting like that! She would pretend to be angry, just to punish him. And she waited with burning face and an aching heart, trying her hardest to keep her mind on him alone as if to communicate her yearning to him and make him come all the quicker; the clock, striking twelve, still found her waiting in vain.

Twelve! Ilze started. Her temples were hammering, flaming circles came and went before her eyes. Perhaps someone had accidentally brushed

the leaves off that branch? She hastened outside and groped for the branch in the darkness. Her hand touched the leaves—they were there. He won't come!—a voice cried out within her. He won't come! He won't come! She had been waiting for nothing, all her hopes, all her passionate yearning had been for nothing, nothing! He had been trifling with her affections!

Her face was aflame. The blood was hammering at her temples, and she could barely check a wild impulse to fling herself down in the dewy grass and cool her hot body against it.

Her heavy feet stumbled towards the barn. She let out the dog and went back to the outhouse, where she sank to the floor and broke into a fit of uncontrollable sobbing. To deceive her so! How she had longed to kiss his eyes, holding his head in both her hands, to kiss him and beg him—oh, so sweetly!—to mend his ways! How she had dreamed of belonging to him, to him alone! And he had cast her aside! She clutched her pillow, pressed it to her face, dug her fingers into it. Bitter hatred stirred in her heart. Ah, let him dare it now, let him dare to come... hark! was that the fence creaking?

She sat up.

No, it wasn't him. It couldn't be, because earlier in the evening he had met some cronies of his

at the inn, and was now lying on the innkeeper's bed dead drunk.

The clock in the farmhouse struck one.

Ilze broke down completely. She felt so miserable and utterly forlorn that she would have gladly died on the spot. She lay there weeping silently until gradually her tears dried up, the gust of passion died down, and sleep came to her relief.

When Made knocked at her door first thing in the morning it took Ilze some moments to realize where she was and what had happened. Then everything came back to her, and she jumped to her feet. Her limbs felt weak and heavy. Picking up her scythe, she followed the others, who were well ahead in the meadow. But she was glad to be lagging behind them, though. When the others had skirted the meadow she was still struggling at the very start. Ješka came up to her.

"You're not at your best this morning," he said gently. "Let me help you."

And without waiting for her reply he stepped in front of her and finished her turn, greatly to her confusion. She had been so rude to him the day before, yet he seemed to have forgotten it,

and when she made a vain effort to pull herself together and do her second turn he helped her again.

"I didn't sleep well last night," she said weakly.

"Yes, you do look pale," Ješka said anxiously.

At lunch she happened to take a seat next to him. He beamed with happiness and lingered at table until everybody else had risen.

On Saturday they were spreading the hay, and when Ješka found himself alone again with Ilze he timidly ventured to ask:

"What was the matter with you?"

"I was afraid," the girl said.

"Afraid of what?"

"I don't know. I thought I heard someone walking about in the yard. I bolted the door, but I was still afraid. What if he forces it, I thought."

"Mm," Ješka muttered, adding after a slight pause, "You ought to have a guard."

"A guard?" she queried, going on with her work.

In the afternoon they raked the new-mown hay, and when the workmen scattered over the field, Ilze and Ješka again found themselves side by side.

"You may be right about a guard," she dropped casually after they had been working for some time in silence. He stopped to look at her. She

returned his look with a smile. Ješka suddenly grew very pale.

"You're laughing at me again," he said in his slow manner.

"I'm not. I mean it. If you don't believe me. . . ."

"Well?"

"Aren't you asking too many questions!"

That night Ilze made her bed in the outhouse again. When the deep and regular breathing of the sleepers filled the servants' quarters, Ješka got up noiselessly and tiptoed out of the room. He crossed the yard in three bounds and cautiously opened the door of the outhouse. It was pitch-dark inside, and he stopped, afraid to venture further.

A long moment passed before Ilze, in a voice of suppressed excitement, whispered, "Who's that?"

"It's me," Ješka murmured, awkwardly groping his way towards her. His hand came in contact with her shoulder, and he pulled it away, frozen to the spot. He swallowed hard, and could not utter a word.

"Where are you? Won't you sit down?" Ilze whispered, seeing that he did not budge.

"It's so dark," Ješka stammered, and flopped

down on the chest by her side. The poor boy was trembling with both joy and fear—fear lest by a whim of hers he should lose that joy again.

His hand went out in search of hers but dropped again uncertainly. Then he became aware that she, too, was trembling. The discovery gave him courage, and he seized her hand and clasped it in his. He sat like that for a long time in utter silence, too happy for words. At length he whispered:

"I never dared to hope you'd care for me."

The girl made no reply, and for some ten more minutes they sat speechless. Then he gently put his right arm round her shoulders, and moving his lips so close to her ear that his thick moustache brushed against it, he breathed:

"May I kiss you?"

Just then the dog barked and rushed up to the outhouse. Ilze started and strained her ears. The fence creaked as if under some heavy weight. The dog barked more fiercely.

"Someone's coming," Ješka muttered.

"I think so."

"Shall I go and see who it is? Shall I?"

"Do!"

"Damn him, whoever it is! But if it's him—" and leaving his sentence unfinished he squeezed Ilze's hand and disappeared in the darkness.

She heard him shouting something furiously. Another all too familiar voice made a taunting insolent reply. A fence board crashed under the pressure of powerful hands. There was a moment's silence, and then....

Ilze stood motionless, listening. Good God, what was happening out there? A groan, sounds of wrestling, a voice moaning....

Presently Ješka was back at her side, breathing hard.

"The rotter!" he gasped. "He wanted—I got him, though. He'll remember me for a long time! Have you anything... a handkerchief or something? There's blood...."

"Are you hurt?" Ilze cried. "Where?"

"Oh, nothing much... my left hand."

The lid of the chest creaked as she opened it, and a moment later Ješka felt something very soft against his hand. It was Ilze's new silk shawl.

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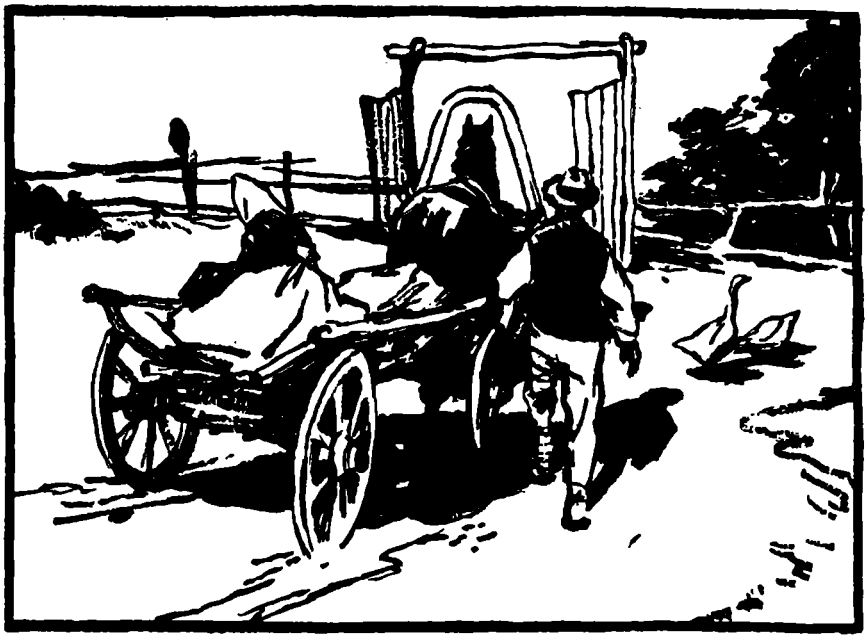

IN THE LAP OF HAPPINESS

"Yes," said old Lausk, and his voice crackled through the church like dry kindling wood that had lain in the chimney corner all through the winter.

The pastor turned to Jeva, and repeated his question in a solemn voice. She felt her legs go weak. It wasn't too late yet. She could still say "no," and then all the things of that moment

would pass like a midnight dream—Lausk with his shiny bald head, his two houses, her future rooms with their painted floors and high windows, the new buggy drawn by the glossy black stallion, which she had just been eyeing with secret joy outside the inn. She could still push all this away from her, and go on living in her dark corner of the servants' room, where her mother had not even been able to die in peace for the noise of other people's children, and where there was just enough room for a chair, but none for the spinning wheel. And next year she might have to work for a farmer whose cattle yard would be flooded with dung through which she would have to wade all summer and autumn. And so would her sister, and both would have to wait until perchance each found herself a husband, who might turn out to be a good handsome lad, or who might turn out to be a drunkard.

"Yes," she answered firmly, and her voice rang so clear and loud that it reached even the organ player up in the gallery. And immediately she felt light at heart, as if she had just topped a steep hill. The weakness went out of her limbs, and when the pastor joined their two hands together, and the old bridegroom gave hers a little squeeze, she even responded to the pressure. After all, it was of her own free will that she was now stand-

ing where she was. No one had influenced her; she herself had chosen to become the mistress of a rich farm, and the only heir of that old widower. For how much longer could those cold, gnarled hands of his hold the keys of the house?

As the couple kneeled by the altar, peace and contentment flooded Jeva's heart. Her disengaged hand touched her light grey skirt to feel the soft, fine texture of the expensive material. It had been his wish, not hers, to buy it. And that beautiful veil, too, that almost reached the floor. There was nothing he would not have bought for her if she had let him—he was so kind to her.

Once more she resolved to be equally good and gentle to him, and to show him as happy a face during the brief spell of life that remained to him as if she had married the finest young man her heart could desire.

She got up from the altar, her eyes modestly downcast. But when the strains of the wedding march rose upon the air and the music came pouring down from the organ in joyous exultation like the waters of a broad and powerful stream, she raised her head and cast a swift glance about her. In that single moment she caught so much admiration and envy on people's faces that she did not drop her eyes again but walked on, smiling, with a flush on her cheeks. And when she stepped out-

side the church and her ear caught the words, "Really, he doesn't look so old!"—she felt as though a crown had been placed on top of her myrtle wreath.

A band of six musicians struck up a welcome to the long procession of wedding guests and relatives of both the bride and the bridegroom, and to the sounds of music they took their seats at the table. The young bride looked like a rose. Servants carried round mugs of beer and urged the guests to eat and drink, and soon the constraint that usually accompanies a gathering of people who hardly know each other gave way to gaiety, and dancing began.

The bridegroom led the *pagast* school-teacher up to his bride and jokingly appointed him his deputy for the dancing. Then she was invited by the *pagast* clerk, and other young men followed suit, so that Jeva danced almost all the time. Finally she was approached by a slender youth with a mop of dark hair a lock of which hung down his pale, damp forehead. He was a distant relative of Jeva's and had recently finished his apprenticeship as a cobbler. He bowed to her rather awkwardly in silence and held his broad hands out to her. Jeva rose, and as they danced she felt that he was holding her closer than the

others had done. She stopped after the first turn and said:

"I'm tired."

"You've danced too much," he replied and let her go. "Take a rest. You still have the whole evening before you!" He made another timid bow and left.

Jeva sat down and followed him with her eyes. That boy—he had never taken any money from her either for mending her old shoes or for making new ones. That was why her sister had wanted her to invite him along with their other relatives. He was wearing a very ill-fitting suit made specially for the occasion.

After a while the young cobbler entered the dance hall again. When he saw Jeva sitting where he had left her, he came up and sat down on the empty seat beside her. She could smell wine in his breath as he leaned towards her and said:

"We've just drunk your health, your old man and I!"

He said it quite simply, without any hidden meaning, but the words fell upon Jeva like a blow and she did not reply.

He leaned still closer, very gently put his hand on hers, and trying to catch her look asked in a soft, sad voice, "Well, and how are you feeling?"

Jeva started so violently that the boy's hand

slid off hers. There was that in his tone which she ought not to permit. A sharp, angry retort sprang to her lips, but she checked herself, smiled and replied gaily:

"Oh, splendid! Never felt better! Shall we dance again?"

This time they danced longer, and the young man instinctively pressed her still closer to him.

"No more dancing with you!" she thought when the dance came to an end. She was annoyed. She had been feeling so happy and contented until he had come along with those clumsy hands of his.

She opened the door to the adjoining room. The air in there was thick with the smoke of cigarettes and cigars. There were only men there, sitting around the tables, all of them either well advanced in years, or very old, talking, drinking, and playing cards. Her eyes at once fell on Lausk, who was leaning against the window-sill roaring with laughter, and all she could see in that laughing face was the huge black gap of his mouth around which the sallow skin was gathered in ugly folds. She quickly crossed the room and went out by the other door.

Something had stirred in her that she had to keep down. In her helpless despair she ran outside and made for the outhouse where clothes were kept, and which temporarily had been arranged as a bedroom. One of the doors stood open, probably

to air it. In its far corner on the clean white deal floor stood a brand new bed. On it were sacks of hay covered with new sheets, and pillows in new pillow-slips. The bed was covered with a blanket which Jeva had made herself. It had been lying for a long time in her chest, and one could still see the creases where it had been folded. The stiff material looked to her like a sheet of metal. She was suddenly reminded of a booklet someone had once brought her from town with drawings of ancient instruments of torture.... She hastily turned on her heel and went out, her lips tightly drawn. In the yard she ran into Ilze who was looking for her, as the clerk wanted to dance with her. But the very thought of going indoors made her wince. She threw her arms round her sister's waist and pulled her away from the house.

"What's the matter with you?" Ilze said.

But Jeva did not answer and hurried on, crossing the yard and the orchard with its many rows of apple trees until she reached the edge of the field, where she flung herself down on the grass. Ilze sat down beside her.

"What's the matter with you?" she repeated.

"Don't ask," Jeva breathed, pressing both her hands to her temples and hiding her face on her sister's breast.

The sun was setting. The evening was still and

balmy. Now and then a late swallow soared through the air, and from somewhere near by came the long-drawn voice of woman calling her pigs home.

Ilze embraced her sister and began to weep, her tears wetting Jeva's hair and neck. Suddenly Jeva's body shook with soundless desperate sobbing.

"Oh, Ilze, my darling!" she whispered. "Had I known it, had I known it before!"

And there they sat, folded close in each other's arms, till night extinguished the glow of sundown, and the corncrake started its solitary song.

"Let's go!" Ilze urged.

But Jeva did not move.

Meanwhile the guests quietly retired one by one, some to the hay-loft, others to the straw shed. The *vedej**-mother was looking for the bride to lead her to bed. Her voice rang through the yard—what was the matter with the bride? Had she run away?

Ilze sprang to her feet, and Jeva followed her slowly, as if part of her were dead. Without explaining where she had been, she silently followed her *vedej*-mother towards the outhouse to the gay tune of a march. In the light of a candle she saw

* An elderly woman relative who takes care of a motherless bride, acting as a sort of sponsor at the wedding.—*Tr.*

Lausk sitting there waiting for her. Some of the guests lingered a while, cracking jokes about the couple who were about to be bedded, but soon the bride and the bridegroom were left alone, the door was locked on them, and the musicians struck up a closing march, and then retired.

The next morning the newlyweds were wakened by the musicians playing a hymn, after which a terrific din was raised by the young men, who banged all the saucepans and kettles in the house. The sponsor unlocked the door, and let out the bride and the bridegroom. Jeva looked as pale as if she had spent the night wrestling with death. She kissed Ilze and whispered in her ear to get her a glass of wine. A good long sip revived her, and she became as gay as she had been on the previous day. Lausk, on the other hand, emerged from the outhouse a different man. He jested, and drank, and moved around so nimbly that some of the guests laughingly remarked that they wouldn't be surprised if the young husband started to dance that night. However, that did not happen.

When it was time to retire again, Jeva did not cry: she drained two glasses of wine. On the following night she did the same.

And then the pickled cabbage soup was steaming on the tables, and it was time for the guests to depart. All to a man said it had been the jolliest

wedding party they had ever been to, and they heartily shook hands with Lausk and Jeva, profoundly convinced that they were leaving behind a couple, who, for all the disparity in years, would be completely happy.

Ilze remained with her sister for a few more days to help her remove the traces of the festivities and put the house into workaday order. Then she too had to go. Jeva saw her off, and at parting gave her all the money which the guests, in accordance with an old wedding custom, had given her. When Ilze wanted to thank her she broke down and sobbed bitterly on her shoulder.

"Sister, sister dear!" she cried. "Why didn't you stab me in the heart the first time I ever told you about Lausk!"

Ilze left her with tears in her eyes, but Jeva returned to her new home with a blithe tune on her lips. Once she had resolved to act the part of a happy woman she would keep up the pretence! And hiding her sorrow away deep in her heart she went about her household duties so briskly and efficiently that it was a pleasure to watch her. She took great pains to please Lausk in every way, indulging his every whim and tending to all his needs. Accustomed as she was to being in service from early childhood she did not have to make any special effort to be diligent and industrious in

everything she did, and as time went on Lausk became less repulsive to her. He proved to be a reasonable, kind-hearted old man, who, seeing his young wife treating him with so much consideration, went out of his way to "repay her for her love," as he put it. He bought her expensive shawls and all kinds of rich ornaments, and ended by putting all his money in her charge. But Jeva never dressed up. She would merely show her husband's rich presents to her friends and the farm people, then put them away to lie and fade in wardrobe and drawers. Why make herself beautiful? For that bald-headed old husband of hers? As for friends and neighbours, who knew her to be modest and thrifty, they admired her the more for always wearing a plain cotton shawl when she could wear silk if she wanted. Her simple habits in the midst of luxury greatly raised her reputation, and she tried still harder to live up to it.

Two years passed during which Jeva's care and attention seemed to have rejuvenated old Lausk. Jeva's fame spread far beyond the boundaries of her *pagast*. She was held up as an example to all housewives, and many a poor girl would utter with a sigh, "Ah, why can't I have Jeva's luck! Am I not as good as she is?"

But no one knew how often, through the dreary

watches of the night, Jeva would wring her hands and cry out in mute anguish, "Oh God, why don't you save me? Take him from me, or let me die!"

But old Lausk went on living, and she, too, had a sound constitution, although the roses had faded from her cheeks, and two deep lines had appeared in the corners of her mouth.

Two more years passed, and the old farmer said he was feeling as sprightly as a young man.

In the fifth year of their marriage, on St. George's day, they hired a young farm-hand by the name of Janis. He was tall and handsome, with broad shoulders, gentle blue eyes and fair hair. He had his mother with him who was too old to be of any use in the fields, but could earn her crust of bread by twisting yarn, and knitting, and mending things.

At first Jeva hardly took any notice of him. Old Lausk was still quite strong enough to supervise the men's work, and she did not interfere. Then the farm-girls started telling her about him —how good he was, and how very kind to his old mother. She began to watch him, too, and found that the girls had been right. It was very touching indeed to see that big lad tending to his old mother, suffering all her senile whims, and even making her bed for her when she felt too weak to do it herself.

"You're very fond of your old mother, aren't you?" she once said to Janis.

He looked embarrassed and dropped his eyes. In the simplicity of his mind he did not know what to make of such a question, and saw in it a hint of mockery. Young farm-labourers were not as a rule affectionate sons and the mistress might think it unbecoming in him.

"She's so old and poorly," he said almost apologetically. "Who knows how soon I may lose her." And after a short pause he added, "You, too, seem to love your old man very dearly!"

"True, true," Jeva replied with a forced smile. "You and I, we may be parted any time from those we love."

She turned away from him quickly, clenching her teeth. What unintended mockery! He likened his aged mother to her old husband!

After that she always sent Janis' mother a bowl of hot soup from their table, and whenever she cooked anything special for herself and Lausk she would not forget the old woman. She took to lingering near her, listening to her talking about her son, which the old woman did most readily, and she would look into the mother's face and see there the face of Janis with his gentle blue eyes.

Her restlessness grew to overpower Jeva and

she could not sleep at nights. She became so pale that her husband felt worried about her and asked her whether anything was ailing her. Perhaps she was working too hard? There was no need for her to do that—she should make more use of the maid.

But how could she give up work, which alone kept her mind off its despairing train of thought! And she replied that she was feeling perfectly well, and went about her work with redoubled zeal, labouring from dawn to dusk. Nevertheless, peace would not return to her heart. She went to church, but even that brought no peace. Her sufferings began to get the better of her.

It was hay-making time. Janis was an experienced and dexterous worker, but it chanced that while sharpening his scythe one day he cut his hand. The blood spurted from the deep wound, making his mother, who happened to be close by, scream with horror. Jeva came running out of the house, and when she saw Janis standing there all covered with blood she stood frozen in her tracks. The next moment she rushed back to her room, took a piece of clean linen and some granulated sugar that peasants usually apply to wounds and hastened back across the yard. She dressed the cut with trembling hands and would not rest in peace until Janis had assured her several times

that he hardly felt the pain any more. As if to prove his words he gave her a sudden smile and said in his soft voice:

"Thank you, mistress, thanks a lot."

During the night that followed this little incident Jeva hardly slept at all. She seemed to feel Janis' warm blood on her hands, and she wiped them on the sheet and the quilt, tossing about in her bed and crying bitterly.

What was she to do?

She rose at dawn with the solemn expression of one who had made an irrevocable decision. She calmly went through the day's work, but when Janis came up and asked her to change his bandage she told her maid to do it, saying that the sight of blood had made her feel sick the day before.

A few days after Janis' hand had healed Jeva had the whole household on their feet, looking for half a loaf of bread which was alleged to have disappeared. As nobody could find it, Jeva remarked in the presence of Lize—a notoriously gossipy servant girl—that she would not be at all surprised if that bread had strayed into the corner where Janis' mother lived. That same day Janis came to Lausk, very red in the face, and asked him whether his wife considered his mother a thief.

"I don't think she is a thief," Jeva said. "But it is rather strange, the way that bread disappeared."

Janis needed no more. He refused to stay on a moment longer and went to look for another job.

"You should have tried to make it up with him," Lausk said. "Such a good worker! I'm sure his mother didn't steal that bread."

"Of course she didn't! But if he's so touchy, let him go!"

"Just as you please, I don't mind," Lausk replied and said no more about the matter when Janis arrived with a horse and cart and began to pack his belongings.

In paying him off Jeva put a year's wages on the table and said:

"That's to save you taking the matter to court."

"I wasn't going to," he retorted. He counted the money and put it back on the table. "You don't owe me all that."

"Take it. It was my quick temper that made you quit, so it's only fair I should suffer the loss."

"I don't want it," he retorted.

Jeva took the money and counted off half of it.

"All right, take a half."

It was still much more than was due to him, and he hesitated before taking it. He thrust it into his pocket without saying a word.

When he said good-bye to her she took his hand and pressed it warmly.

"Good-bye, Janis, good-bye, and good luck to you!"

Although Janis' departure had left only one corner of the house untenanted, the farm seemed bare and desolate to Jeva. Unutterable misery weighed on her heart. Nothing gave her pleasure, neither work in the lush green meadows, nor her large household, nor all her wealth, nor her duty to old Lausk. That's why she was so glad when her sister Ilze arrived unexpectedly. Ilze was now married and rented Lausk's other farm, which he had inherited from his daughter and son-in-law, whose dissolute life had ended in premature death. Ilze had brought her first-born with her, a lively boy of four, whose ringing laughter and pranks took Jeva out of herself a bit. The poor woman grew so fond of the child that she was reluctant to let him go. But the boy flatly refused to stay with her, so Ilze took him away, plunging Jeva back into melancholy gloom. The visit had touched another painful cord in her heart. Why could she not have a fair-haired child like that? Why was she not surrounded by a crowd of boisterous children? Alas, that would never be. . . .

Dizzily she went through her days. Was that old man going to live for ever? She felt deceived,

dimly recalling that when he had asked for her hand he had said that the most he would last was a couple of years. Yes, that was what he had said, or something like that. And now he went on living and living. Would she have to hasten his death herself? And she glared at her husband, as he walked briskly from the barn to the stables and from the stables to the house, with a hatred that could have killed if it had the power to. He looked as if he meant to live to a hundred at least.

Ugly thoughts stirred in her mind. She could poison him, and his sudden death would arouse no suspicions, for his time had long since passed. They had lived together so peacefully that no shadow of suspicion would fall on her. And if it did, if the thing came out and she, too, had to die—what did it matter? Her present life was a misery she were best put out of.

Her mind sank ever deeper into gloom and confusion. She began to complain of sleeplessness, and finally declared she would go to town to see a doctor. But just as she was about to set out, a man drove into the yard at breakneck speed and brought news that her sister Ilze was on her deathbed and that she would have to hurry if she wanted to see her alive. All her dark thoughts vanished at this news like so many bubbles that rise in muddy waters and disappear under the impact of

a powerful blow. She got into the buggy and rushed off to see her sister.

Ilze, indeed, was dangerously ill, but with Jeva's devoted care she pulled through and began to recover. In a few weeks she was on her feet again.

The night after that happy event Jeva slept sweetly and soundly. She had not slept like that for a long time. In the morning she rose as light and happy as a young girl. She stayed with her sister a little longer, and when at last she left for home it seemed to her as if she had been away for years. She was homesick and drove into the yard in the highest of spirits. Lausk had been expecting her—the street door was adorned with oak branches and the rooms decorated with garlands of flowers. Jeva was deeply moved by this unexpected welcome, and she pressed the old man's hand with genuine feeling. But nothing had changed, alas! He was as old and ugly as ever.

Jeva threw herself into her work. Work was her only salvation. She worked as hard as her servants, and this took her mind off those maddening thoughts for a time. But melancholy descended upon her again like a black veil. What am I working so hard for? Who am I saving for? Who will get it when I am gone?—she asked herself bitterly, for Lausk was sure to live long enough to pre-

vent her from marrying a second time. Resentment against him welled up in her again.

Sick to death of pretending, caring nothing for gossip, she no longer tried to conceal her true feelings. Now and then she even spoke roughly to Lausk, but he didn't seem to mind, seeing how much work she had on her hands, and how hard she was trying to do it well. His wealth grew, and it did his heart good to see it growing. True, he was rich enough without Jeva having to lay herself out the way she was doing, but old people's minds are apt to take a thrifty bent, and if they are no longer able to multiply their riches themselves they enjoy others doing it for them. And so he said nothing when Jeva paid less attention to his meals; his health, thank God, was still good enough to stomach anything, so why bother with all that baking and cooking!

But soon the farm people, too, noticed that the food was getting worse. Jeva was becoming close-fisted. Years of saving, stinting, and collecting odds and ends had gradually become a habit, a habit of storing up wealth for its own sake.

She no longer asked herself—who am I saving up for? Misery and despair tormented her less now. It was no longer the anguish of her heart that drove her out of bed at peep of dawn and kept her up till late at night, but just plain stinginess.

Lausk, meanwhile, had reached the eighty-sixth year of his life. He was as dry as a mummy, and his skin was like grey-yellow parchment. Yet people, looking at him, would say, "He's still going strong!" Jeva, on the other hand, had become a fat, pale-faced matron who looked as if she could not pass a flower without crushing it underfoot.

She loved weeding. It gave her tremendous satisfaction to pull up plants, just pull and pull away and pile them up neatly.

One day she was squatting in the garden by the beetroot beds. A heap of chick-weed, marigolds and camomile lay behind her. She plucked a thistle, but accidentally a beetroot came up with it. As she pushed it back into the ground with her left hand, she cut her finger on a piece of glass that happened to be lying there. Two dark drops of blood trickled into her palm, and watching them she suddenly remembered a scythe, a gush of blood, a pair of gentle blue eyes. "Thank you, mistress, thanks a lot."

Memories surged up in her. Automatically she resumed her weeding, forgetting all about the cut, and for the rest of the day she never gave it a thought. But in the middle of the night she woke up with a pain in her finger. The next day it grew worse. The finger was swollen and blue. She ap-

plied some waybread to it, but the pain did not ease and grew unbearable during the night. In the morning Lausk wanted her to go and see the doctor, or send for him, but she said she was better —perhaps because she really thought so, or because she grudged the expense. In the evening, however, the pain became so unbearable that she asked for the doctor herself. He came in a few hours, and at the sight of her finger and hand he made a wry face and said it looked very bad. Richly manured earth, he said, contained a lot of decaying matter and germs that were poisonous to the blood, and unfortunately Jeva's blood was poisoned. Gangrene had set in and her hand would have to be amputated. She must go at once to the nearest hospital, for he could not undertake such an operation, either here or at his home.

"Give me some medicine!" Jeva cried. "I won't have my hand cut off."

The doctor explained once more that an urgent operation was needed, and implored her to go to the hospital without a moment's delay, as no medicine now would help her. But Jeva stubbornly insisted that she would not have her hand cut off, and the doctor went away, promising to send her something to assuage her pain.

A few days later Jeva died. Old Lausk was desolate.

"Why did you have to die first!" he wailed broken-heartedly. "Why could not I die instead! What shall I do all alone without you! Oh, you have been kind to me, so kind! You loved me better than my first wife. Sleep, sleep soundly. I shall give you a magnificent funeral—yes, that I shall. . . ."

And stooping down he pressed his dry thin lips on Jeva's silent mouth.

1898

THE SHADOW OF DEATH

A southerly breeze was still blowing, driving the ice-floe farther and farther out to sea. On it were fourteen men and two horses. The men had been so busy with their under-ice fishing that none of them had noticed when the ice-floe began to move. It was Karlis, a sixteen-year-old boy, who, running after a horse that had strayed shorewards, first discovered that the ice had broken away from the

shore. He had rushed back at once to warn the fishermen, but by the time they ran down to the edge of the ice-floe it was too late to save themselves. Juris Škara, who had a wife and three children at home, had plunged into the water in a fit of desperation, and they had seen him drown almost within a stone's throw of the beach.

Several hours had passed, and the ice-floe was still drifting on slowly but steadily. The pallor of the first shock had gone, but the anguish of their hearts was still reflected in the men's faces. Their faces were drawn, their brows puckered as though in pain, and all eyes had that little flame of secret despair burning in them.

It was all too clear to them now that every moment bore them farther and farther away from the shore—and from life.

The fishermen stood about in small groups, talking in low tones. The younger and unmarried ones—Gulbis, Birkenbaum, and Janis Dalda—all well-knit, sturdy lads, had gathered round Karlis, to hear once more how fast the boy had run, and how far he thought the ice had drifted from the shore when he first discovered the disaster.

"Couldn't you swim ashore?" Birkenbaum asked.

"I think I could," the boy replied. "The water's very cold now, but still, I think I could have done it."

"Pity! If you'd known it was . . . er . . . going to be like this . . . you might have tried at least to save yourself."

"And ended up like Škara?" Janis Dalda said.

"Maybe. . . . I think I could have made it, though," the boy said with a sigh. "If I'd thrown off my coat, and tried hard. . . ." His clear blue eyes filled with tears.

"There now, why talk like that, it'll all come right." Birkenbaum tried to cheer him up. "The wind will shift round, and our folks will come out to search for us. You mustn't get downhearted."

The boy quickly drew his hand across his thin, wet face and said, "I won't!"

A little distance from them stood a tall, skinny old man of swarthy complexion, with a broad wiry beard and a Gypsy nose. His eyes were fixed on another man seemingly not much younger than himself who stood facing him, his hands clasped behind his stooping back. They were Cubuk and his son Ludis.

The young married men had drifted together, forming a separate little group: Grintal, tall and handsome, Skapan, thick-set and with fat rosy cheeks, Skrastin, pale and gentle-mannered, and broad-shouldered Silis.

Old Dalda was talking to Sturis, an elderly

bachelor, while Zalga and Gurlum stood each by himself.

Grintal, with his confident voice and calm demeanour, dominated the group of young husbands. He discussed the possibilities of rescue, almost monopolizing the conversation, and his self-possession and coolness held the men fascinated.

"We'll drift two or three days at the most," he was saying, and there was a ring of conviction in his voice, as though they were on board a ship of which he was the captain. "Two or three days. Even if it's a day longer, we'll manage on the fish Zalga has in his sleigh. And if that's not enough we can kill a horse."

"True enough," Skrastin said, his pale, good-natured face crinkling into the ghost of a smile in his attempt, as usual, to lend a humorous touch to his words. "We'll eat a horse. They say horse-flesh tastes sweet."

Skapan's full red lips twisted, while Silis's face showed disgust.

"Why, what's the matter with you? We're not eating it yet," Grintal said mockingly.

"And when we are, he'll be the one to ask for the biggest helping," Skrastin added. "Or will you give your share to me, Silis?"

"Never mind that! Must you talk about it now?" Silis said testily. "If we've got to eat it we'll eat

it, and that's that. I must say, though, such things have never been heard of in our parts. The year before last I remember having heard of fishermen being swept out to sea from Jamburg, or wherever it was, but they reached land again in three days."

"So they did," Grintal joined in. "And last year I read in the papers about the same thing happening on Saaremaa Island. It has happened on our Kurzeme coast too. But we've never heard of anything of the kind in these parts."

"My father did tell me of one case," old Dalda began, turning towards the group of young men. "I don't remember now whether it was nine men, or ten, or eleven, that were lost then."

"Lost?" Skrastin repeated. "Lost?"

"Yes, they were lost," the old man said quietly, and his rheumy swollen eyes swivelled back to his son Janis and fastened themselves on his face. The men fell silent, shamefacedly avoiding each other's eyes, as men always do in moments of great distress as well as shame.

"Pooh," Grintal resumed after a while. "Why should it happen to us? I don't believe it. I've got a feeling this is going to be a sort of... er... well, let's call it a dangerous little trip, that's all. I did feel a bit creepy at first, you know—it's no joking matter. But just think of it—here we are, fourteen men, of whom—let me see, one, two,

four, six, eight—eight are as sturdy a set of men as God ever made. Can we disappear just like that, for no reason at all? I say, we can't."

His deep powerful voice sounded so pleasant in his companions' ears that their faces began to brighten. Nobody really believed what he said, for nobody was child enough to think that youth and strength alone could ward off misfortune or fate; yet it was comforting to hear that manly voice expressing so convincingly the innermost yearning of each one's heart.

"I say, we can't," the speaker repeated. "Why, every time there's trouble brewing my wife has a bad dream.... It's a fact, I'm not joking. But this morning she didn't say anything to me. Besides, just look at Birkenbaum—d'you suppose God would let him die, a fellow like that? To say nothing of the rest of us."

Birkenbaum's eyes wandered from face to face with a friendly smile. His eyes were as clear and gentle as a child's, and in the middle of his pink cheeks there were tiny delicate white spots like the touch of a spring flower. The irony of Grintal's remark was lost on no one but Birkenbaum himself, who took it for a compliment to his good looks, when everybody else knew it was intended as a gibe at his temper. And that was generally considered a pretty nasty one. Birkenbaum did

not hail from Kurzeme, but had drifted down there from the central parts of Vidzeme. He had floated rafts of logs down the Ogre river into the Daugava, and down the Daugava to Riga. Thence he had strayed on to Jelgava, then to Kuldiga, and from there to Liepaja, where he had hired himself to Zalga, the very same Zalga who was now standing aloof, all by himself, looking the picture of yellow despair.

Birkenbaum was known to possess great physical strength and to be a bully. Because of that strength his life was as secure as that of the son of an American millionaire who had his father's money to back it. And he had squandered that strength just as extravagantly. There he stood, as vigorous as ever, scanning the faces of his comrades in distress with bright clear eyes.

"One thing is certain—more eyes would weep for him than for any of us," Skrastin said, smiling wistfully. "Isn't that so, Birkenbaum? I've got a wife, and a little boy, and a daughter who'd cry for me, but you—just how many would mourn you?"

Birkenbaum just shrugged his shoulders and grinned.

"Now let's collect all the fish," Grintal said looking at the fish that lay strewn on the ice around Zalga's sleigh. "You never can tell when

the ice-floe may break up, and it would be a pity to lose a single fish."

The men dispersed to gather up the fish, and then went over to Zalga's sleigh to stow it away. But Zalga sat on the top of his sleigh and refused to let anybody come near it.

"You may keep what you've got," he said. "What's lost is lost, and that's all there is to it."

"What d'you mean?" Grintal asked.

"I mean that this sleigh here belongs to me, and I won't have you meddling with it," Zalga said, and with the greedy gestures of a miser he proceeded to tuck the matting and tarpaulin round the edge of the sleigh-hamper.

"You're mad!" Birkenbaum cried. "You're not going to gobble up all that fish by yourself, are you?"

"That's my business," Zalga snapped, his yellow face hardening and his eyes gleaming like those of a greedy monkey.

Birkenbaum flared up.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he exclaimed. "This fellow still thinks the fish is all his own! Get off that sleigh, you old devil!" He dropped the fish he was holding, caught hold of Zalga and dragged him down, but the old man clung to the matting as a spider clings to his web.

"Let him be, Birkenbaum," Grintal intervened.

"We'll settle it peacefully. We'll buy the fish from him if need be."

Birkenbaum released his grip, and Zalga promptly resumed his perch on the sleigh. It struck the fishermen that Birkenbaum was not such a bad sort after all. Some of them even said so. Gurlum alone stood aloof and said nothing. He was a hard man and knew that no one wished him well. His one concern now was not to look ridiculous, for he was very vain and touchy. Worried lest he should lack the spirit to die honourably if all hopes of rescue were lost, he was trying his best to keep up an appearance of calm indifference.

The wind strengthened towards noon, raising the waves, and the ice began to crack. The fishermen, whose dark faces had begun to brighten, lapsed into gloomy silence again as the sounds of cracking increased.

A sharp ominous snap suddenly ran down the whole length of the ice-floe. Karlis, who was standing beside Birkenbaum, clutched his hand.

"Frightened?" Birkenbaum said, and attempted a smile as he looked into the boy's blue eyes, which were filled with anguish and despair.

"I'm afraid the ice will—the ice is—" he faltered, and his voice trailed off.

"Splitting? So it is. Ah, well, we can't have it all our own way. It would be too much of a good

thing to go on joy riding on a big field like this."

"I'll stay with you."

"Hadn't you better keep to your employers, Dalda and Janis."

"No, I'd rather—"

"Just as you like."

The boy clasped Birkenbaum's hand. And so they stood, side by side, their eyes searching the surface of the ice-floe to see whether any parts of it had broken away.

The sinister snapping noise was heard again and Birkenbaum put a protecting arm round the boy's shoulders. He felt a tender affection for the child who had singled him out as his protector in that hour of distress.

"Scared?" Birkenbaum said again, trying to make his voice sound cheerful.

"No. It's just—I don't know. My heart sort of twitches. I want to be brave. I say to myself, if it comes it comes, there's nothing to be done about it!"

The two faint lines running down from his nose to the corners of his mouth deepened in his thin flushed face, making him look suddenly old. He was silent for a while, then asked:

"And you?"

"What?"

"How do you feel?"

"Well, not exactly happy, I must say. Sheer brawn isn't of much use to us now," he added almost apologetically.

"What d'you think, how is it going to end?"

"How do I know? You heard what Grintal said —three or four days."

"Do you believe it?"

"Well—there's hope, of course. We may meet a ship."

"And if we don't?"

"Then . . . well, you know what's going to happen then."

The boy said no more. He knew that the only alternatives were rescue or death, yet his heart yearned wildly for the unattainable, for some third alternative—a miracle—because blossoming life cannot believe in death.

The ice-floe glided on. The waters surged and roared, breaking against its edges and chipping off piece after piece, and those pieces continued to float alongside, grating against the margin of the ice-floe.

A grey-green crevice suddenly appeared between the two groups of fishermen. It widened swiftly. Before they realized it Sturis, Skapan and the two Cubuks were separated from the others. Cries of horror broke from both sides. The men waved their arms wildly and dashed about on the edges of the two ice-floes like scurrying ants. Old

Cubuk wanted to plunge into the water, but his son forced him back. The distance between the two ice-floes increased so rapidly that swimming from one to the other was out of the question.

"They're done for," Grintal said. "Cut off without a scrap of food. I'm sorry for Skapan.... Come on, move to the middle, we must stand in the middle! And let's keep close together."

They moved in silence towards the centre of the ice-floe.

Anxious-eyed they watched the clouds scudding across the sky looking like dirty sheets. They gazed at the booming waves, which swirled around them without end. The monotony of it gradually eased the tension. A desultory conversation sprang up.

"Poor Skapan," Janis said to old Dalda, his father. "I'm sorry for him. Married only five months."

"Old Cubuk, too—well, his time was almost up, anyhow—same with Ludis. They've had their day. But Sturies, such an honest trifty fellow—all his life, and now—now—."

Old Dalda did not utter a word. Why talk about other people's troubles when you were in the same boat yourself! He glanced at his son, and his lips twitched.

"Mother said she'd have stewed cabbage for us tonight," he said. "I daresay she knows by now...."

Janis nodded. His father blinked, and even pressed a forefinger to one eye, but could not stop the tears from rolling down his cheek into his white beard.

"Yes, she probably knows by now," he repeated. "What's she going to do, with both of us—both of us—. If you at least would have stayed home. I don't mind about myself. Nor will she much—but you—you were her—."

Again his swollen eyes blinked, and his nostrils quivered. Janis clenched his teeth. Nothing affects us at once so deeply and painfully as the grief of others over our own fate.

"Oh, don't take it to heart so." He spoke with difficulty. "We'll reach land safely."

"Yes, like those nine or ten before us. We are ten too now."

Towards evening Grintal asked his comrades whether they were hungry. His voice had regained its old confident ring, and the weary hearts of the fishermen revived and went out to him in gratitude. Skrastin answered for everybody, saying they were hungry, of course, but what was there to eat? The fish was raw, and the horses were alive.

"Let's try the fish," Grintal said. "We haven't got a saucepan. What about cooking them in my leather cap?"

"Wouldn't a leather apron be better?" Silis remarked.

"It might, if it isn't stained with tar," Grintal said. "Let me see yours. No, it won't do. We'll have to use the cap. Take one of the sleighs to pieces for firewood, and crush some ice."

While these instructions were being carried out, Grintal walked up to Zalga, who was sitting on the edge of his sleigh, his hands wedged between his knees.

"Take that mat off!" Grintal said. But instead of complying, Zalga spread his arms out on both sides as if to defend his property.

"Take that mat off the fish!" Grintal raised his voice. His eyebrows came together in a straight grim line.

Zalga ran his hands nervously over the matting that covered the sleigh. The yellow shrivelled skin of his lower jaw twitched, and his pointed chin seemed to grow sharper still. He muttered something under his breath, but all Grintal could make out were the words ". . . fix the pay."

His ruddy face flushed.

"Are you mad!" he shouted. "Maybe you want a taste of sea water? Get off, I tell you!"

Zalga got off and slunk away behind the horse.

Grintal lifted the matting, counted off two fishes of more or less equal size for each man, and started cleaning them.

When, after a good deal of trouble, the fire was started, they filled Grintal's cap with crushed ice and held it over the flames by two strings, pulled through each of the ear-flaps, until the ice melted. Then they threw the fish in and lowered the "saucepan" into the fire. They did not dare to cook the fish properly, for fear of running out of firewood, and just steamed it slightly, portion by portion. Then the food was distributed.

"Of course, we must be thankful to have this," Skrastin remarked, "but I don't think anyone of us is going to lick his fingers after this meal."

They forced themselves to eat, but the fish, half-raw and smelling of sweat and sea water, tasted horrible. Birkenbaum was the only one to eat his full portion.

"I've always had a splendid stomach," he said. "I could swallow stones if I had to."

"When the water closes over you, you learn to swim, and when starvation is at your door you learn to eat," Grintal said, as he put his fish away in his pocket. "Anyway, we can't afford to waste it."

"I've got a little bread left over from the morning," old Dalda whispered to his son. "Let's step aside, I'll give it to you."

"What about you?"

"Oh, I can do without."

"No, Father, have it yourself."

"No, no, I know you want it . . . you're young, you must be hungrier . . ."—and he drew Janis aside and tried to force a slice of bread into his hand, but Janis wouldn't take it. He turned away, repeating:

"Eat it yourself."

Twilight fell. Grintal ordered the men to turn the empty sleigh round so as to have the wind from one side. They sat down in the sleigh, back to back.

And so they sat through the night in utter darkness. There was not a star in the sky. A fierce wind blew. The sea howled and roared.

Nobody closed an eye. They stared into the black night, which pressed down upon them like a curtain of lead.

"I'm so hungry!" Karlis whispered to Birkenbaum. "If only that fish didn't taste so horrible!"

"Can't be helped," Birkenbaum said.

There was a long silence, then he heard the boy heave a sigh.

"What's the matter?" he asked indifferently.

"I'm hungry!" the boy whispered.

Birkenbaum ran his hands up and down his knees and did not answer. Then suddenly he rose,

pulled the boy to his feet and drew him aside. He took a flask out of his pocket and thrust it into Karlis' hand.

"Have a drink," he ordered, and the boy opened the flask and drank.

"Mind you don't tell the others," Birkenbaum added, taking back the flask. "Now try and have a bite."

They returned to the others, and the boy managed to fight down his repugnance and eat some of the fish.

Nothing more was said for a long time. The night dragged on, the sea surged and roared, the ice creaked, and the wind brought them whiffs of the briny deeps.

"Birkenbaum, are you asleep?"

"No."

"May I rest my head on your knees a little?"

"Yes."

Karlis placed his hands on his companion's knees and laid his head on them. Birkenbaum felt how cold the boy's hands were. He pulled off his glove and clasped the frail icy fingers in his large warm hand. Slowly warmth returned to them, and after a while he could feel it flowing steadily from him to the boy and back again. Karlis fell asleep.

The boy's quiet breathing—he could feel it by the steady rise and fall of his chest—and the

warmth of the fingers clasped in his own stirred in Birkenbaum the memory of other nights, nights that had nothing in common with the peaceful slumber of this exhausted boy.

So this was the end. Never again would he lie in bed with eyes wide open and heart beating high, waiting for the rest of the household to fall asleep, that he might rise noiselessly and cross to a bed in the other corner of the servants' room, stepping cautiously with bare feet over the cool earthern floor.... Never again would he open the door of the barn, and lie languorously in the shade of the tumbled hay, playing with sunburnt little fingers. What a queer trick fate had played on him! He had spent many years as a shepherd far away in the Ergli hills, drinking and enjoying life, fooling around and acting at an amateur theatre, and had once sat behind prison bars for two days, paying for some piece of folly, and now... now here he was, sitting in a fisherman's sleigh, the sea raging round him, and he—moving towards death. It couldn't be true! Such things only happened in stories, or in dreams. It was a nightmare, one of those horrible dreams that are as real and vivid as life itself. Come on, wake up! Nonsense. He knew only too well he was not dreaming. All this was grim reality—this ice-floe, and the salty wind, and the roaring seas. His hunger, too, was

real, and so was his impending death—death by starvation, or drowning in the fathomless deeps together with this boy, and Grintal, and all the others, all these strong men lusty with life. He shuddered. His mouth felt dry and hard. No, this could not happen! Not to him. One read or heard about such awful calamities in stories of remote lands, but not here, not like that. Birkenbaum was always sure that he would go through life unscathed. When anybody hurt a hand, or broke a leg, or received an injury at work or got drowned, he was positive that nothing of the kind could ever happen to him. And now here he was, on a crumbling ice-floe, and around him night and death. Curse that Zalga! If he had only left him alone, he might have returned to his native parts. He would now be sleeping in his warm room, and the farmer, with a little lantern in his hand, would be waking him to go and feed the horses.

He shivered again, and unwittingly squeezed Karlis' fingers so hard that the boy stirred uneasily in his sleep. Birkenbaum released the boy's fingers and let his hand rest on his shoulder to calm him. Some of the tension went out of him. After all, there was still hope, there was still enough food, anything might happen yet!

But as the night dragged on, drearily, endlessly, despair caught him by the throat again. His crav-

ing for life became clamorous. Only with the break of dawn did he doze off into a fitful slumber.

He woke with a start, shivering. The others had already risen from the sleigh and stood staring at the sea. It was raw and chilly and Karlis, though still asleep, was shivering too. Birkenbaum did not want to disturb him, so he remained sitting until the boy woke up. Then they joined the others.

The same dreary hopeless scene met their eye as on the previous day: grey foam-crested waves below, grey clouds above. The ice-floe had grown smaller and rounder, and greenish blocks of ice rocked and ground against its windward edge. The men seemed to have grown old overnight, and their eyes had a harassed haunted look in them.

Skrastin exchanged friendly words with Janis, patted Karlis affectionately on the shoulder, and went up to Grintal who, by tacit agreement, was the accepted head of their little company.

"What about some breakfast?" he said.

"Fish again," Grintal said. "Raw for those who prefer it so, and slightly steamed for the others—while we still have some wood."

The fire was made, and the fish prepared in the same way as the day before. They ate with the same loathing, too. Birkenbaum took Karlis aside, and each took a draught from the flask.

"You're like a brother to me," the boy said.

"Oh, I don't know—there's nothing I can do for you really. You're a good boy. I'll make a man of you yet."

"When we get back we're going to be friends, aren't we?"

"Of course we are."

They re-joined the others, and Grintal told Birkenbaum to fix a fish-pole to one of the sleigh-shafts for hoisting a flag of distress. Did anyone have a red kerchief? None did, but three of the men—Grintal, Janis and Skrastin—were wearing red shirts.

"Well, Skrastin, will you let us have your shirt for a flag?" Grintal asked.

"If I must, I must," Skrastin said ruefully. "I'll freeze to death, I'm sure. I'm a terrible one for catching chills, you know. I bet my lips are blue already, even with my shirt on. But if you say I've got to give it—"

They all looked at the speaker's lips, which were actually turning blue. Grintal couldn't help smiling.

"All right, we'll try to manage without your shirt," he said. "I'm willing to draw lots with Janis."

"I don't mind," Janis replied.

Grintal pulled a leaf out of his notebook, tore it in two and drew a cross on one of the halves.

"The one who pulls out the cross gives his shirt," he said, holding out both slips for Janis to choose. Janis took one. It was the one with the cross.

"Stand against the wind," he said, and quickly threw off his fur coat, jacket and waistcoat. His sinewy arms and broad chest were bared for half a second, and there he stood again in his coat like the others.

"It's like plunging into icy water," he said.

The shirt was fastened to the pole and hoisted. The men suggested breaking a hole in the ice and sticking one end of the pole in it and fastening it to the sleigh shaft to keep it up. This would save them the trouble of holding it. Grintal, however, was determined to distract the men's thoughts by keeping them busy, and he insisted they should take turns in holding the pole, two at a time. The pair on duty were also to keep a sharp lookout for possible rescuers.

When Birkenbaum's turn came round he wanted to keep his watch by himself, but Karlis would not hear of it. He grasped the pole, resolved to do his share in holding up their signal of distress against the wind.

"I'm thirsty," the boy complained after a while.

"D'you think I'm not?" Birkenbaum rejoined. "Take a bit of ice and suck it."

"A bit of ice! My mouth's all sore as it is! How long d'you think we can hold out?"

"Who can tell. No one has tried it before."

"Oh, if I could only get a proper drink."

"Stop snivelling!" Birkenbaum said.

"It's all right for you, you're a big strong grown-up. You wouldn't talk like that if you were my age."

Birkenbaum thought of the past night, and he softened towards the boy.

"I know it's hard, ever so hard, but what can we do," he said.

"I never could stand the cold," Karlis continued to complain. "And now I have to swallow ice. And I've got such a pain just below the ribs. Every time I sneeze it's like a stab."

"Yes, I suppose, I'm luckier, that ice doesn't seem to disagree with me at all."

Soon Skrastin began to complain of the same trouble, and the men realized that this was a new danger they had not thought of before.

Again Grintal tried to console his companions.

"We've still got two horses," he said. "There's plenty of warm juice in them when we really need it."

"To drink blood!" Silis exclaimed.

"A thick, sticky liquid, tastes sweetish and salty," Birkenbaum calmly explained. "I've drunk blood before."

A mingled expression of longing and loathing showed on the men's faces: longing for the warm drink, and instinctive loathing at the idea of drinking blood.

"We're not thirsty enough, that's what it is," Grintal remarked, "we'll sap that birch-tree all right when we really need its juice."

When Birkenbaum's and Karlis' turn came round again to stand by the shaft, and they had been standing their watch for some time in silence, the boy suddenly asked:

"You've been through all sorts of things, haven't you?"

"Why d'you ask? Because I've tasted blood? Perhaps you would have done the same. I was about your age then. We had just slaughtered a calf. I was as curious as a cat."

"Yes—How old were you when you began to—"

"To drink? Drink brandy?"

"No—Oh, well, never mind—Tell me, what would you regret most of all if we never got back?"

"Why, life, of course! Losing life!"

"I don't mean that. Everybody's sorry to die. I mean something special, all your own. A mother, a brother, a sweetheart."

"I haven't anything special. But when I think of how I might have gone on living for many more

years the way I had done, I feel kind of sorry. I don't know why. Sorry for life, sorry for myself."

"That's just how I feel too—sorry for myself. But especially for one thing. I've always wondered—I've always wondered what it's like when —when two people—Oh, Birkenbaum, I do wish I were you!"

He looked at his big friend, and the pain of unsatisfied longing glittered in his eyes.

"It's all one!" Birkenbaum answered gruffly. The boy's words had touched him to the quick in his most intimate feelings. "It's all one. You're sorry for this, I'm sorry for that. It's all nonsense, anyway!"

Their watch was up, and another pair took over.

In the evening each was given his share of fish, and yet another weary night descended upon them, bringing visions of warm rooms with bright lamps burning, of pale women wringing their hands in despair, of eyes suffused with tears. Even Karlis slept little and uneasily, though he had again rested his head on Birkenbaum's knees. On the morning of their third day there was no firewood left. But no one thought of cooking the fish. With greedy, wary eyes they watched the portions being distributed, seeing that no one got more than his share. All the time Zalga had not left his

sleigh, but now Grintal ordered everybody to keep away from it except at meal times when they were allowed to approach it to get their fish.

"Is there anything left in your bottle?" Karlis asked Birkenbaum, drawing him aside.

"No."

"But there was a lot left."

"I finished it last night."

"What, and left me nothing?"

"I never promised you to."

"Promise! But you know I suffer worse than you do!"

"It's my flask, anyway. And I'm not feeling so well myself. You ought to be thankful for what you got. Anyone else in my place would have—"

"Oh! So that's the sort you are!"

"What d'you mean?"

"Oh, go away. You know what I mean. There was such a lot left . . . enough for both of us for tomorrow, and for the day after. And you lapped it all up yourself!"

"Listen to him!" Birkenbaum cried angrily. "Why, you little wretch, you! Scolding me, are you? If you don't hold your tongue, I'll box your ears for you!"

"I'll box yours!" the boy cried, barely keeping back his tears, and flashing a look of hatred at Birkenbaum. "Drunkard!"

Birkenbaum stepped close up to him and slapped him over the mouth.

"Now hold your tongue," he said.

The boy's face was transfigured with rage. He seized Birkenbaum's hand and tried to bite it. But Birkenbaum snatched it away and gripped the boy's wrists like in a vice. Digging his teeth into his lower lip the boy tried to kick him. Birkenbaum pulled him so close that he could not move. Suddenly he felt the boy's body grow limp. He released his grip, but had to catch him in his arms to save him from falling. The boy's head drooped lifelessly against Birkenbaum's chest.

"Karlis, Karlis, what's the matter?" he cried, shaking him.

"A drink," the boy whispered. "Give me a drink."

Birkenbaum led him up to the sleigh and went over to Grintal, asking whether they could not, for the boy's sake, bleed one of the horses. The boy's strength had given out, he said.

"We'll have to talk it over with the others," Grintal replied. "We can't kill a horse just for the boy."

He called the men together, and they decided to wait.

Grintal cast a sad look at Birkenbaum, and the little group dispersed.

Birkenbaum had got used to having Karlis by his side, and suddenly felt lonely without him.

He went up to Gurlum and said a few words to him, but the old man just stared at him. He went up to Skrastin, who turned his sunken, mournful eyes upon him and muttered. "Well, Birkenbaum," then shook his head with eyes averted. He turned to the two Daldas, father and son, but they were so deep in their talk about Mother Dalda, and how lonely she would be, and about the possibilities of rescue, that they did not seem to notice him even. He lingered a while and passed on. Gulbis and Silis were watching Zalga picking his mat to pieces and feeding it to his horse. He avoided this group, loathing the sight of Zalga's eyes. Grintal was standing by himself, keeping his watch. But Birkenbaum walked past him without even stopping to talk, for he sensed in that handsome, well-built young fisherman an indefinable superiority over himself which he secretly resented. He returned to the sleigh. Karlis was still crouching on it, staring into space with vacant eyes. Once, twice Birkenbaum walked past him, but the boy remained motionless. Birkenbaum sat down beside him, but still the boy did not stir. They sat like that for a long while, until it was time for Birkenbaum to take up his watch. He stood on watch all alone and sore at heart, for no one came up to

talk to him, no one seemed to notice him. His watch over, he was relieved by Skrastin and Gulbis, and sauntered off to the edge of the ice-floe. The ice on which he stood could break off and send him hurtling to the bottom of the sea for all he cared! That would be his fate anyway. Sooner or later the ice-floe would go to pieces and the waves would close over him. How small it had become. And how persistently the fragments grated against its edges, while the waves hurled themselves at the greenish-coloured blocks of ice as if they would engulf them and fling their white frothy crowns at the men's feet.

Birkenbaum walked round the ice-floe and returned to the sleigh. The boy had not moved. His lips had turned blue, and his narrow forehead, from which the cap had slipped back, was waxen yellow.

Birkenbaum sat down beside him.

"Karlis!"

The boy did not stir.

"There is nothing to drink, Karlis," Birkenbaum went on. "Nothing but ice. But if you like, I'll melt a piece in my hand so the water won't be so cold. Look here! If you really cannot stand it any more—do you hear me? If you just can't—I—I'll cut my hand."

Karlis started and glanced hungrily at Birken-

baum's hand. A moment later Birkenbaum was pressing his left hand against the boy's mouth. Karlis seized it as if to push it away, then suddenly yielded and began to suck. Birkenbaum tore off his scarf, ripped it in two and bandaged his hand below the thumb.

In the evening, after Grintal had doled out the fish, a small cloud came floating across the sky, and little flakes of snow began to fall. Then the wind dropped, and the sky cleared. Myriads of stars twinkled overhead, and the Milky Way gleamed whitely. But the dispirited men never raised their eyes. They spent the night in a stupor.

But the morning brought fresh hope, for it was clear and calm, and a passing ship was more likely to notice their red signal of distress. But the day passed, and their hopes were dashed.

That evening Grintal told them that they had fish left for only another two days. He proposed cutting down the ration to one fish each so as to make it last a little longer. But most of the men were against his proposal, so Grintal distributed the usual portion of two fish each that night. Silent and exhausted, with sunken eyes and cheeks, they huddled together in the sleigh again. The waters were roaring close by, and they could feel the ice-floe rocking and heaving under them.

Karlis clung to Birkenbaum.

"This is the end, isn't it?"

"I think so."

"You'll hold out longer than I will."

"I think so."

"Oh, I do wish it were over quickly. Those who die will be thrown into the sea, won't they?"

"I think so."

"I want you to throw me in when I die. Will you do that for me, please? Oh, I wish it were over quickly.... Oh, dear, dear Birkenbaum!"

The boy pressed his head against his shoulder and sobbed. Birkenbaum was silent.

On the morning of the fifth day, at breakfast time, Grintal noticed a wisp of smoke far out to the north. He drew the men's attention to it, and every one strained his eyes towards the spot. The little cloud gradually grew clearer, till at last there could be no doubt that it was the smoke of a passing steamer. "Raise the signal!" the men shouted all at once, crowding round the shaft. As the smoke grew bigger new life seemed to flow into them. The colour returned to their pale faces, their dull eyes sparkled. Exclamations of joy came even from Gurlum's habitually silent lips.

Old Dalda turned away, weeping tears of joy and praying. For a time the column of smoke stood unchanged. Motionless, the men gazed at it, holding their breath. Then their eyes became fixed

and filled with horror. The cloud of smoke began to dwindle. The steamer was receding. Either she had not seen their signal of distress, or had not cared to notice it. She had passed them!

The shadow of night fell upon their faces. The men who had been holding the flag-pole dropped it, and Zalga, digging his teeth into the sleeve of his fur coat, stamped furiously on the red shirt. Poor Skrastin collapsed on the sleigh, muttering something unintelligible and chuckling to himself. Karlis clung to Birkenbaum. Grintal still stared at the spot on the horizon whence the smoke had disappeared.

Suddenly Janis cried out:

"A boat! A boat!"

Everybody spun round. Janis stood facing south, waving his arms. A small boat was approaching. It was already so near that they could count seven people in it. Two were rowing, one was steering, and four were sitting idle.

Old Dalda raised his clasped hands to heaven.

"Birkenbaum! Birkenbaum!" Karlis sobbed.

When the boat drew close enough for them to distinguish the faces of its occupants they saw three strangers, and Sture, Skapan and both the Cubuks, the latter four looking more dead than alive.

The fishermen rushed towards the boat. One of the rowers leapt out into the ice-floe.

He said something to the men, but they could not understand him, as he spoke in a language that was not Latvian. He finally made it clear to Grintal by signs and gestures that the boat could take only seven persons.

Only seven. And they were ten. Who should be rescued, who left behind? They stood for a moment as if stunned. Then Zalga suddenly made for the boat.

"Get in who can! Whoever is left behind must stay."

But Grintal seized him by the arm and jerked him back.

"Stay where you are. We'll draw lots again. Agreed?"

"Why not try first whether we can't all get in," Skrastin ventured. "If we see we really can't we'll draw lots."

But the stranger would not agree to that. He indicated that this might capsize the boat.

"Very well, we'll draw lots," Grintal said. "Stand in a line according to age. Dalda, Zalga, Gurlum, Skrastin, Silis, right? Now, let's see, who comes next—Birkenbaum, Gulbis or Janis? Janis? All right. Karlis and I come last."

Again he tore some leafs out of his notebook, made ten equal slips and drew crosses on three of them.

"Those who draw a cross remain behind."

He rolled up the slips of paper, put them into his cap and held it out to Dalda. The old man drew one and opened it. Blank. Zalga's hand trembled as he reached for his. He seized first one, then another and finally unrolled the third. Blank. Gurlum was equally lucky. Skrastin solemnly made a sign of the cross before he drew. Blank. Grintal approached Silis. It was about time someone drew a cross. Silis' hands shook so violently that he could barely unfold his slip of paper. Saved! Janis thrust forth a confident hand and drew the first cross. Two crosses and one blank remained in the cap. Grintal's lips tightened as he held it out to Birkenbaum. For a moment Birkenbaum held his breath. Then he quickly picked a slip and opened it. He had drawn the last lot of life.

Grintal emptied the cap, letting the remaining two slips of paper drop on the ice.

"No need for us to draw, Karlis," he said. Then, turning to the others, he commanded, "Well, get along!"

Zalga and Gurlum jumped quickly into the boat. Gulbis and Silis followed. Skrastin went up to Grintal and shok his hands. "Give my love to my wife," Grintal said to him. Birkenbaum, too, took leave of Grintal and Janis. Then he turned to Karlis. The boy stood riveted to the spot, staring at

the boat. Birkenbaum's face worked as if he were in great pain. He seized the boy's hand and pressed the thin cold fingers. But the hand felt limp in his and when he let it go, it dropped lifelessly to his side. Birkenbaum stepped hesitatingly towards the boat, then stopped again. He was evidently struggling with himself. Then he turned abruptly and, with a last tortured backward glance at the boy, he slowly stepped into the boat.

The two Daldas, father and son, stood a little apart. The old man was obviously unable to leave his son.

"Hurry up, Father Dalda!" Grintal urged him.

"I'm staying behind!" Dalda said.

"No, you're not. I won't go! Not for my life!" Janis exclaimed.

"Go, son! Go! You'll come back for me sooner than I would for you. I'll be waiting! Go on!"

"Father!"

"Go, son, go! Love to Mother from her old man. And don't forget I'm waiting! Get in quick!"

"I can't, I won't!"

But old Dalda pushed Janis towards the boat, until he was forced to step into it.

"Good-bye, son! God bless you!" the old man cried, repeating quietly to himself as the boat moved away:

"Good-bye, son, God bless you!"

Grintal waved his cap to his comrades, then put his arm round Karlis' shoulder and stood motionless. Dalda, too, seemed frozen to the spot he stood on, his shoulders hunched, his body straining shorewards.

And thus they were last seen by Janis and Birkenbaum, who never took their eyes off them as long as they remained in sight. The outlines of their figures shrank to grey dots on the horizon.

And then they, too, vanished.

1899

THE PUG-DOG, OR ACCIDENT IN TERBATA STREET

(An amusing but unedifying story in two parts)

Those of my readers who have been following my career as a writer may remember that I once wrote a tale of a talking pig. This was so well received and favourably reviewed, that I decided there and then to write another tale about a laughing horse. But fate intervened, and that story was never written. This, however, by no means diminished my interest in the quadruped,

and not long ago it was gratified by a third story, which I have modestly mentioned in the above heading, an amusing tale of a pug-dog who was breadwinner to a whole family.

The fact that certain creatures and beasts support the lord of creation is not in itself surprising. Not to speak of the horse that does man's ploughing, or of the common tame parrot, we have known instances when three or four people were kept by half a dozen trained fleas. Anyway, a couple of years ago a certain "Mdlle. Emmeline and Her Flea Theatre" visited Riga, and that lady looked anything but undernourished; on the contrary, she was fast approaching that bodily condition the averting of which had brought fame to Professor Schweininger. A two-headed calf has also been known to have supported a family of six or seven. Pug-dogs, too, are known to have earned a pretty penny for their owners by exhibiting their art in a circus. But the pug-dog I am going to tell you about had no art to exhibit, and never did a stroke of "work," to use a circus idiom, and yet provided for a whole family.

He was simply rich.

He belonged to a pleasant house in a healthy part of Riga—the Petersburg suburb—or, to be more precise, the house belonged to him, and he occupied five of its rooms on the ground floor;

these constituted its left wing. The right wing was let to a doctor, a human doctor, of course, but one who, if the pug-dog was unwell, stealthily practised the veterinary art for fear of having his rent raised.

In addition to the house, the pug-dog owned an elderly lady who had the oddest pair of jowls imaginable: they hung down on both sides of her chin like two sagging pockets. The lady's mission in life was to provide the pug-dog with whatever he needed to make his world an earthly paradise. She fed him and put him to bed, washed him, and combed him, sewed for him and fondled him. In cold weather he wore back-warmers of the latest Parisian style as per *La mode du chien,* which the lady subscribed to. In her spare moments the lady collected the rent from the tenants and signed the receipts, as the pug-dog himself could not write. In return for these services, she was permitted to keep a cook and a housemaid, to have her meals together with him, and to share his bedroom. The lady slept on a spring mattress, the pug-dog on a blue velvet cushion with yellow violets embroidered in silk. On the window-sill in the sitting room there was another cushion of black fancy velvet on which the dog lounged and watched the passers-by.

The rents were high, and the old lady was thrifty and economical, with the result that in the course of time the pug-dog's substantial income grew into a pretty large capital. But it would be wrong to conclude from this that he was a miser. A lover of good fare, he believed in gratifying his palate, and the old lady followed his example. The animal asylum in the town could likewise testify that the pug-dog did not count stinginess among his vices. He was treated there once when seriously ill and after happily recovering he bestowed an annual grant of 100 rubles on that institution, payable on New Year's Day. However, he showed little concern for man and his woes, and looked down on the world, or rather the street outside his window, from his velvet cushion with philosophical calm. As it was impossible to help everybody he thought better than bother his head with trifles.

This comfortable way of life, however, began to tell: the pug-dog put on flesh. The doctor advised more exercise in the fresh air, and the old lady, shedding bitter tears, bought him a muzzle, and wove a silken leash for him with her own hands so that her precious darling should not get lost or go astray.

Thus, starting with Christmas, they peacefully took their daily constitutional together, the old lady walking on the pavement, the pug-dog trot-

ting beside her. It was a rare occasion when he left the curb to sniff with wrinkled nose at the peculiar liquid that lay frozen under the ice in the gutter. Greatly to the pride and satisfaction of old Mrs. Kluckerstroem, he took little or no notice of the other dogs, a sure sign that Bobby—I ought to say what his name was—lavished all his affection on her alone.

Then things took an unexpected turn. With the coming of spring Bobby began to grow restive, and his former indifference towards other dogs gave way to a lively interest. In vain did Mrs. Kluckerstroem appeal to his sense of aristocratic dignity. She pleaded, and tried flattery, but it was of no avail. He plunged ever deeper into the morass of plebeian jollity, especially if a she-pug, married or unmarried, came his way. And one day his behaviour was so outrageous that the distracted and shocked old lady took to her bed for the rest of the day, and firmly decided never to go out with him again. But as she could not think of letting her treasure out into the street by himself, her decision implied permanent confinement for the dog.

However, Mrs. Kluckerstroem proposed, and Bobby disposed. For was he not lord and master in the house. No longer content with sitting quietly on his black velvet cushion, he pressed his nose

against the window, and jumped up and down, yelping with excitement. Then he made a dash for the door, upsetting four flower-pots, one of which—a seventy-three-year-old cactus just about to break into blossom—all but cracked in two. Then he leaped on to the plush sofa, leaving on it traces which could be removed only by the cleaners. In a word, Bobby carried on just like an elderly bachelor driven by a belated passion to the point of idiocy.

Mrs. Kluckerstroem bore this disgraceful exhibition till evening, then sent for the doctor. That heartless man, however, merely smiled—he looked as if he would have laughed outright if he dared—and advised her to let Bobby go out by himself, so that he could sow his wild oats out of doors, and return home the respectable well-bred young gentleman that he was.

"And what if he gets lost?" Mrs. Kluckerstroem said anxiously.

"How can an intelligent dog like him get lost!" the doctor replied. "Even if he does, he has a silver plate on his collar with his address engraved on it, and people will be only too glad to take him home and get a reward for their pains."

It was nevertheless with a heavy heart that Mrs. Kluckerstroem one fine morning kissed her treasure on the nose, opened the street door and

let him out. The dog bounced out of the house and whizzed away, and the lady, who stood watching him, saw him stop by a lamppost, sniff at it, and . . . and then she went back to her room.

Filled with gloomy forebodings, she sat down by the window and took up her knitting—a backwarmer for her darling made of soft pink wool, which was to be a surprise gift for his nameday, since she did not, unfortunately, know the day of his birth. Bobby's name was not given in any of the calendars—neither in Kecker's, nor in Miller's, nor in Plate's—but her own being Babette, and both their names beginning with the same letter, she took the liberty of celebrating his nameday together with her own.

But she could not keep her mind on her knitting that day. Her eyes kept turning towards the street, and every five minutes she would heave a sigh and shake her head in dismay, as she pictured to herself the possible situations in which her Bobby might be finding himself at that moment. She strained her ears for the sound of the doorbell, for she secretly hoped that her darling would bethink himself and return home. Perhaps he was standing there right now, waiting for some kind passer-by to press the shiny brass button for him. But the bell did not ring, the hours went by, dinner time approached, and still there was no sign

of Bobby. Mrs. Kluckerstroem ordered the food to be put in the oven, for she would not sit down to her meal by herself. At last Bobby turned up outside the kitchen door. He was filthy, but did not seem to care a bit, and strutted into the hall where Mrs. Kluckerstroem was sitting by the window with her knitting. She put away her work quickly, jumped to her feet and cried, clapping her hands together:

"*Aber Bobby, Bobby Süssling, wie siehst du aus!*"

That was all the chiding he got, for on seeing him safe and sound all the anger that had been rising in her during the long hours of waiting went from her heart. She took him by the forelegs and marched him to the bathroom, where with the help of warm water, soap and a soft sponge the maid soon transformed him back into a civilized pug-dog. Thereupon Mrs. Kluckerstroem gave him a tender kiss, and they sat down to dinner together.

This went on for three days in succession. And then the blow fell. Bobby disappeared.

We now come to the second and longer part of this amusing story.

The house in which the pug-dog and Mrs. Kluckerstroem lived had two small basement rooms with a kitchen. One room was occupied by the house-porter with his wife and child, and the

other by his brother Karklin with a wife and three children. The house-porter managed fairly well on the wages he received, but Karklin could barely make ends meet. He had come to town from the country with no profession or trade, had got a job in a factory, but had soon fallen ill and lost it. He now made a precarious living by doing odd jobs when he could get them. More often than not he couldn't. If at such times his brother was unable to help him, he had to draw his belt very tight. It was at a time of such crisis that our pug-dog embarked upon his orgy of freedom and unrestricted wanderings.

The first time Bobby returned from his independent ramble Karklin was standing by the gate wondering which way to turn in search of a job. The dog went up to him, wagged his stump of a tail, and slipped past him into the yard. Karklin went down to the banks of the Daugava and earned thirty kopeks that day.

The second day Bobby went out was a Sunday. Karklin was helping his brother to sweep the street outside the house when the dog made his proud exit by the front door. To flatter Mrs. Kluckerstroem, whose head could be seen at the window, Karklin's brother called the dog, patted him on the back and played with him a little, then Karklin, too, stroked the dog's velvety coat in re-

turn for which Bobby sniffed at him and ran off on his business.

"That's what I call life!" Karklin said with a sigh as he followed Bobby with his eyes.

"Yes," the house-porter replied, and both went down to their basement lodgings where Karklin's two elder children were sitting in the kitchen, ragged and barefooted, over a meal of boiled potatoes which they dipped into salt.

On the third day of Bobby's freedom Karklin had scanned the whole river-bank and the railway line, vainly searching for a job. All he brought home was fifteen kopeks. Utterly fagged out, he entered the yard, and there ran into Bobby's cook and the housemaid, whom Mrs. Kluckerstroem had sent to look out for the dog, it being long past the hour when he had returned the day before.

When Karklin asked what they were doing in the yard, the heartless girls said with a sneer that they were waiting for that "nuisance of a dog" to come home.

"Does the mistress think so much of him?" Karklin asked.

"I'd say she does!" cried the cook. "Heaven forbid that that lump of fat should disappear! I shouldn't like to live to see that!"

"He's a handsome dog!" Karklin hazarded the remark.

The housemaid sniggered by way of reply. But at that very moment Bobby squeezed through a gap in the fence, and she rushed over to him, welcoming him with a torrent of endearments. The cook was not to be outdone, and so they escorted him home like a conquering hero, one on each side of him.

Karklin lingered for a long time, staring at the door that had closed behind the dog and his two escorts. Then he went downstairs to his basement rooms where his family were enjoying a royal meal of dry bread soaked in the pickle left over from a herring. That night Karklin tossed about restlessly in bed, and rose early in the morning and made his way to the nearest grocery where he had a long-standing debt of ten rubles. He entered the shop and begged the shopkeeper to let him have half a pound of sausage on credit. He was expecting a relative from the country, he said, who was bringing him some money, out of which he would at once settle part of the debt. Half a pound of sausage was hardly worth arguing about, so the shopkeeper gave it to Karklin, who thanked him humbly and profusely.

That afternoon the pug-dog did not return home.

It is impossible to describe the state Mrs. Kluckerstroem was in. She cried so violently that the

sacs on either side of her chin shook, she wrung her hands, she darted from kitchen to bedroom, from bedroom to kitchen, she telephoned the police, she telephoned the animal asylum, she telephoned the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, she put advertisements in all the agony columns, promising a high reward to the finder of the pug-dog. The servant girls had to take their turns of duty at the front door all night long, in case Bobby came and scratched at it, and the house-porter was posted at the gate. But it was all in vain—the dog did not return.

The next day passed in anxious suspense. The cook and the maid did their best to comfort their mistress, telling her that the newspaper advertisements were sure to bring results. The former was prepared to bet that "our darling Bobby" would be returned safe and sound by a reader of *The Baltic Herald*, while the latter, who swore by *The Daily Page*, was certain that Bobby's rescuer would be a reader of that paper. Evening came, and the old lady, who subscribed only to one newspaper, and a German one at that, sent for a copy of every newspaper in town to scan with tearful eyes the agony columns and derive comfort of a sort from the knowledge that other people, too, were reading about her misfortune at that very moment. That night she retired in

more hopeful spirits than she had done the night before.

However, the new day brought no comfort either. It was past dinner time, and no one had rung the bell yet.

Suddenly there came a timid knock at the kitchen door. It was opened by the cook, and in walked Karklin with Bobby under his arm.

"What, you? And with Bobby?" the kitchen nymph cried, and all but flew out. Karklin could hear her crying, "Madam! Bobby is back! Bobby's come home!" Whereupon he heard the rustle of silk skirts, and presently Mrs. Kluckerstroem swept into the kitchen with arms outstretched. The pug-dog, whom Karklin was still holding, began to yelp, and wriggle under his arm, and the man put him down on the floor and bowed.

"*Mein Bobchen! Mein Hundchen! Mein süsser, süsser Möpsi!*" she cried, her voice quivering with emotion, and she stooped to caress her darling, while the dog in his turn stood up on his hind legs and leapt up to lick her lips. "*Ja, ja, ja — bist ja, bist ja wieder bei Frauchen! Ja, natürlich, ja, bei Frauchen! Du... Du... Du... Kussi, Kussi geben... Ja, mein Hundchen, mein Süssling. Da... da... Frauchen gibt Kussi.... Frauchen gibt Kussi...*"—and she gathered him up in her arms, kissing him as if he were a little child.

Not until the first excitement had subsided did she notice how dirty he was, and turning to Karklin she said graciously:

"Ach, so you haf find him, my goot man. Ver you haf find him? He dirty, ach, so dirty! *Ja, mein Schnauzeli, du bist schrecklich schmutzig! Wo bist du gewesen, was, was?* . . . Yes, ver you haf find him? Say, please!"

"I found him near the Kaiser Park, Madam," Karklin replied. "On the bank of the Daugava."

"Ach, so. Dat is ver he go. Tank you, my dear, dat vas ver goot from you. . . . I vill gif you . . . vait, I vill gif you someting."

She went out, with a swish of silk skirts, followed by the dirty pug-dog, then the housemaid came back with a glass of red wine and a handful of candied fruit jellies.

"Put this in your pocket," she said, and Karklin drank the wine and put the sweets in his pocket.

Then Mrs. Kluckerstroem reappeared.

"Here, my good man," she said handing him a gold coin with the figure fifteen on it. Karklin started when he saw it.

"Thank you, Madam, a thousand thanks!" he stammered, reddening and perspiring with agitation, and fell to kissing her hand.

"It is noting, my goot man, noting. A man must haf his *Belohnung*. . . ."

And so joy reigned in Bobby's luxurious apartments, and joy reigned in the basement where the Karklin family sat down that day to a meal of mutton soup with fresh white cabbage and red carrots. Moreover, Karklin was as good as his word, and returned to the shopkeeper part of the money he owed him. When all is said and done, it did not matter much whether the money had come from a country relative or was received as a reward for a service. What mattered was that he had kept his promise.

But ten rubles won't go far when you have five mouths to feed, five bellies to fill, and some indispensable articles of clothing to buy into the bargain. Before the month was out Karklin's children were living again on boiled potatoes and salt, while Karklin himself stood by the gate thoughtfully surveying the street. He still had no regular job. He had worked for about four days as a brick-carrier at a building site but soon realized that he had not recovered sufficiently from his illness to do such heavy work. And there was no easier work to be got.

Bobby in the meantime was giving trouble again.

At first Mrs. Kluckerstroem kept him indoors as of old. But he refused to put up with it and behaved in so uncivilized a manner that the housemaid twice gave notice. There was no help for it!

The lady again produced her silken leash and again began to accompany Bobby on his daily promenades. But Bobby, who had had his taste of freedom, and had moreover got rid of his superfluous fat, wanted to run about unhampered. He would not stand for the leash, and tore at it with such force that his eyes popped out of his head like two white buttons, and the lady's hand went numb with holding on to it. This state of affairs could not continue, and so she let him go by himself, happen what may.

Three weeks passed, and Bobby came home regularly every day. Mrs. Kluckerstroem was just beginning to stop worrying when, one fine day, Karklin confronted the shopkeeper again, and asked for some more sausage on credit. He was bolder this time and demanded a whole pound, and got it too.

That same day there was a great to-do in the luxurious apartments—it was six o'clock, and the precious pug-dog was not yet back from his walk! This time, however, the servant girls found it easier to set their mistress's mind at ease. If his first disappearance had ended so happily, he was sure to be lucky again. All she had to do was to advertise him again.

That was soon done, and Mrs. Kluckerstroem took drops of valerian and bromine and waited.

She waited two days, three days, four days, five days. On the fifth day the only nourishment she could take was the juice of two oranges with a little sugar and water.

But in the evening there came a timid knock at the back door. The cook opened it, and in walked Karklin with Bobby under his arm, the dog looking spick and span, and as smooth as a carpet.

No pen of mine can adequately describe that second reunion between the old lady and the dog. Let us not attempt to count the kisses, the cries of joy, the tears, the yelps, the leaps, the whines, and whimpers that rendered that moment so infinitely touching. Let us withdraw from the kitchen together with the cook and Karklin, who had found Bobby far out in the Agenskaln suburbs playing with some children, and who now went downstairs to his room with twenty-five rubles in his pocket.

Now, twenty-five rubles is a tidy sum, a very tidy sum. However, if you reduce it every day by even a fraction of a kopek, you still cannot make it last for ever. And Karklin had to spend that sum at the rate of a ruble a day. Again he went back to the building job and over-strained himself so badly one day that he had to take to his bed and have a doctor in. True, on hearing of his misfortune, Mrs. Kluckerstroem paid the doc-

tor's fee and the cost of his medicine, and occasionally sent down a plate of soup and a slice of meat, but five people could not subsist on these donations, and hunger knocked at the Karklins' door more and more persistently.

Neither was the pug-dog faring so well as he might have desired. For the first time in his life he could not get his own way with Mrs. Kluckerstroem, and despite all his tricks and wiles she held on to the silken leash. His freedom was confined to the back yard, on two sides of which stone houses reared their backs, while on the third side a high wooden fence separated the yard from the neighbouring garden, and the fourth was guarded by another wooden fence, the gate of which was kept under lock and key. Thus he could neither be stolen away by an evil hand, nor slip out into the street himself, for it had been impressed upon the house-porter that Bobby's escape by the gate would cost him his job.

So Bobby resigned himself to a fictitious freedom, the while he ate well and philosophized on his velvet cushion at the window looking out on the street. And Mrs. Kluckerstroem whiled away her hours by playing patience, utterly at peace with herself and the world.

Karklin, however, was in a low condition. Poor nourishment retarded his recovery, and he loitered

about the yard like a shadow in the gentle spring sun.

One evening, when the children were asleep, he had a long talk with his wife, and both agreed that it was impossible to go on like that. They had to find a way of getting proper food, and the first thing to do was for his wife to get a pound and a half of good sausage. Perhaps the shopkeeper would let them have it on credit. The shopkeeper was only human. He took down a ring of the desired sausage, wrapped it up in brown paper and handed it to the poor woman.

That day Bobby did not come for lunch. The cook called for him everywhere, then the housemaid went out to look for him and discovered a fair-sized hole at the bottom of the fence near the corner of the house. Through that hole Bobby must have wriggled out into the neighbouring garden, whence the faint sounds of barking had been heard. No doubt, he was on some new lady-killing errand!

Eight days had passed since that tragic event. Mrs. Kluckerstroem had advertised Bobby's loss three times in every newspaper, and had ended up with offering a reward of fifty rubles to anyone who found him. She had visited both animal asylums in the town, had written everywhere and telephoned everybody, had wept and wailed, and

lain in convulsions, had been to see a fortune-teller, and had twice consulted the cards. But all in vain! Bobby, "*mein süsser, süsser Bobbutzi,*" remained lost.

She ordered the hole in the fence to be left untouched on the offchance that the dog would come home. Every day she went out to inspect the scene of the accident, examined the traces which the neighbours' cats had left in the sand, then shook her head sadly and returned to Bobby's empty chambers.

On the ninth day, after her usual round of inspection, her eyes alighted on a brightly coloured shirt hanging on a line in the yard. She remembered having seen those bright colours under Karklin's waistcoat, and following a sudden impulse, she went down to the basement flat.

Mrs. Kluckerstroem knocked, and while waiting for the door to be opened she thought she heard a sound of scurrying feet, a sound as of someone chasing something, pushing and shoving. When the door was at last opened the close damp air was thick with dust. The Karklin family have propably been hastily trying to tidy up the room for the unexpected visitor. Karklin was sitting on his bed. By the table stood a little girl, and Mrs. Karklin was in the far corner hanging up some clothes. At the foot of the bed stood a tall basket

with a narrow bottom and a broad top. Through the chinks between the ribs of the basket one could see a layer of coal at the bottom, then a layer of sawdust and scraps of coloured paper, and on top of it all a folded home-spun blanket.

The old lady graciously greeted the family and asked Karklin about his health. He looked embarrassed, and replied that he was none too well, coming along very slowly.

"Yes, dat is not goot," the lady said. "Ven you vass vell, you could my *verloren* Bobby look for. Two times haf you find him. Perhaps you haf luck a tird time. *Schade* you cannot go, you haf such good eye, and you loff my Bobby—yes, you loff him?"

Karklin's wife hastened to reply for him that her husband had been recently speaking of nothing but Madam's beautiful dog and had been wanting to go out and look for him, but unfortunately he had not been feeling strong enough. However, he would go the very next day and walk down the bank of the Daugava, and cross the other side. He might be lucky a third time—you never can tell. Everyone was lucky in his own way, and Karklin had always had a gift for finding things ever since he was a child.

"Dat is vat I say," Mrs. Kluckerstroem echoed. "Yes, my dear, look for dat pug. I vant him back.

If he is not alive den I vant his corpse. *Ach, mein Bobby, mein Bobbiling!*"

Tears streamed down her face, and what with sorrow and the bad air, she suddenly swooned and flopped down on the basket at the foot of the bed. The next moment she leapt up again, startled by the queer sound which the basket gave off.

"Vat is dere? In dat basket—vat is it?"

"Nothing, Madam, it's nothing!" Mrs. Karklin reassured her in a somewhat flustered voice. "Please, do sit down again! It's such a creaky old basket." Saying which, she swiftly snatched the only pillow from the bed and threw it on top of the basket. "That'll be softer!"

Mrs. Kluckerstroem sat down again on the basket and started discussing Bobby's virtues, speaking at great length about his intelligence and his loyalty. The moving story wrung tears from Mrs. Karklin's eyes, and she swore that she would not rest in peace until that noble dog was found.

"You haf a good heart," Mrs. Kluckerstroem said. "I vill not forget you. You haf pity for my Bobby."

She lingered for a while with the sympathetic couple, and it was with a somewhat lighter heart that she finally rose to go. Perhaps if Karklin looked for the dog he'd be lucky again! That man seemed to have a special gift for finding Bobby.

No sooner had she left the basement room than Mrs. Karklin snatched the pillow and blanket off the basket and clapped her hands in dismay.

"Now we're in the soup! My God, that's done it now!" she gasped.

Her husband took one look and sadly shook his head.

"What a mess!" he muttered. "All that beautiful income gone to the winds!" He pondered a while, then added, "But let's wait till tomorrow, I've got a good friend, a bricklayer. For a small tip he may . . . yes, I'll see what I can do tomorrow."

The next day he went out. Nobody saw him return, but at about seven in the evening, when the workers were returning home, there came a timid tap again at Mrs. Kluckerstroem's back door. This time the maid opened it to admit Mrs. Karklin followed by a man dressed in the clothes of a bricklayer. The woman, who looked as if she had been crying, was carrying something wrapped up in her apron.

Gloomy forebodings came to the maid's mind.

"What have you got there?" she asked. "Gracious, don't tell me it's—"

"Yes, it is the dog," Mrs. Karklin replied in a mournful voice and opened out her apron. There lay Bobby, as dead as a door nail. His jaws were wide open as if someone had been trying to stick

a wedge into his mouth, and his fat little legs were oddly twisted like those of a lamb trussed up to be taken to market.

"Call the mistress!"

The maid went out, and soon they heard a scream and a thud. Mrs. Karklin and the bricklayer exchanged glances.

About half an hour later Mrs. Kluckerstroem came into the kitchen, her head swathed in a white towel, looking majestic in her subdued sorrow.

"Tell me about it, my dear," she said sinking into the chair which the maid quickly pulled out for her.

"I don't know anything, Madam," Mrs. Karklin said, squeezing a tear out of her eye with her forefinger. "This bricklayer saw it all."

She came close up to the old lady and wanted to open out her apron again, but Mrs. Kluckerstroem checked her with a gesture and whispered:

"No, no . . . not now. Tell me, my dear!"

The bricklayer shuffled about uneasily, then stammered forth his story. That morning at the new building site in Terbata Street just round the corner, a large pile of bricks had dropped on that dog, and buried it. Some of the men had seen it happen, but each had been busy with his own job and had left it to the other to rescue the animal. The result was that the poor creature was left

lying underneath the bricks. Then Karklin had come along asking whether there was any work for him there. Somebody had replied jokingly that he might start by picking up those bricks, which would be doing a good deed, by the way, since it would mean his rescuing a dog. Karklin had at once undertaken the task and found Bobby, who was already dead. That was how it had happened.

Without a word, Mrs. Kluckerstroem rose from her chair and walked out of the kitchen. A little later the maid came in with a ruble for the bricklayer and a message for Mrs. Karklin to call the next day. The pug-dog was laid on his embroidered velvet cushion and taken into the sitting room. There he lay till Mr. Rosenbaum, the taxidermist, came along with a porter, who wrapped Bobby up in a black sheet and carried him away.

Henceforward, the life of the Karklin family took a sharp turn for the better. In her boundless gratitude to Karklin for having retrieved her Bobby three times, Mrs. Kluckerstroem fed and clothed his whole family till she found a suitable position for him as a house-porter. Nor did her interest in these people end there, for there was not a soul in the wide world who could better appreciate and honour the love she had borne Bobby, poor Bobby who had been the victim of his own recklessness and passion. Every time

Mrs. Karklin was faced with the problem of procuring a pair of shoes for her youngest offspring —for a fourth had come into the world since—or new school books for her eldest boy, she went over to Mrs. Kluckerstroem's. There she would stand in front of "our darling, our beautiful Bobby" whose stuffed carcass sat in state on the velvet cushion, and whose glass eyes were turned upon her with a peculiar look, and she would poke her forefinger into her left eye, then into her right eye, to produce a tear, and suck the air in through her mouth and nose at the same time to make it sound like a sob, and utter in a broken-hearted voice, "Ah, who would have expected it! Why did you have to die so early! You, who had everything one's heart could desire!"

And each time she would return home the richer by at least two or three rubles.

And so Bobby accomplished a mission of generosity such as humans rarely achieve: he lavished charity even after death. And if Mr. Rosenbaum has done his job well enough to keep the moths out of Bobby's beautiful glossy coat, he will remain sitting there on velvet for years to come, easing the life of the Karklin family.

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